

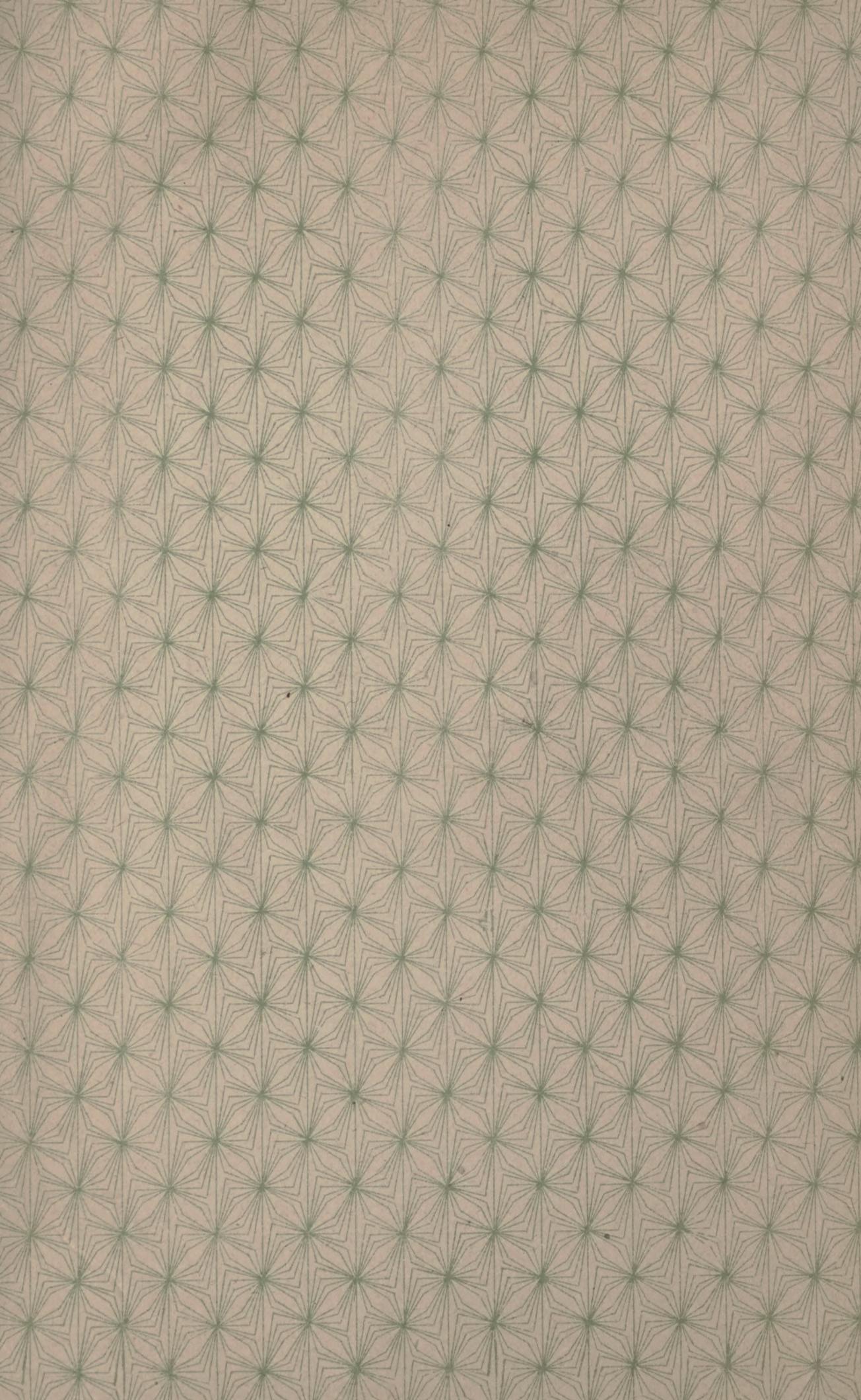
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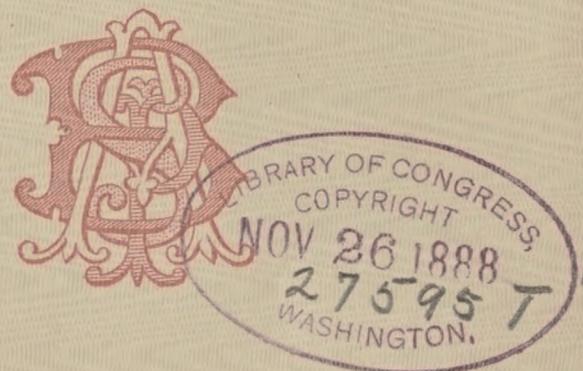
His Choice.

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BY

MAY F. McKEAN.

Author of "Agnes and Mattie," "Florence Walton," Kezzie's Corner," "Marion Elliott," "Marion Warrington," "Flossie Thornton's Investment," "The Dennison's," and "Mrs. Goldworth's Charity."



PHILADELPHIA:

American Baptist Publication Society,
1420 Chestnut Street.

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ton's Investment," "The Dennison's," and
"Mrs. Goldworth's Charity."*

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"To thine own self be true, and keep
Thy mind from sloth, thy heart from soil,
Press on, and thou shalt surely reap
A heavenly harvest for thy toil."

PARK BENJAMIN.

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HIS CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

DISCUSSING THE PRIZES.

ON a pleasant April morning preceding the June of their graduation, the whole graduating class for the year had gathered during recess in the large schoolroom of Hallberg Academy. Three of the girls, Edith Hendry, Reba Ashwood, and Nora Read, were very intimate friends. Though unlike in disposition, as well as in appearance, a very strong tie seemed to unite them, and they were always to be found together. Several other girls and four or five boys made up the class, and they had now gathered together, and were discussing the prizes which had that morning been announced for competition.

Reba Ashwood, who never would consent to be conventional and proper, sat on a desk, swinging one foot carelessly in the aisle. She opened the discussion :

"Well, girls, what do you think of the prizes this year?"

"Why don't you ask *us* what *we* think of them?" asked Clayton Carmon, turning from the window to speak over his shoulder.

"I suppose Reba thinks there's no chance for us boys, if the girls make up their minds to carry off the best of them," replied another from the group of boys, Rob Senderling.

"I suppose Reba thinks you are very saucy!" said that young lady, though her attempt to be severe was somewhat of a failure. The dimples did not leave her face long enough for the slightest suggestion of a frown, and they all understood that her words were spoken in pleasantry as much as those which had called them forth.

Nora Read was sitting upon the seat, the desk of which was occupied by her friend Reba, and was half resting against her in an easy, graceful sort of fashion; in fact, Nora Read did everything in an easy, graceful way. She was the first to give Reba's question a direct answer.

"I think the same of them that I did last year, or

the year before, or yesterday, before they were announced. They are always the same—the ‘Foster Prize’ for Mathematics, and the ‘Weldon Prize’ for Composition. I suppose Mr. Foster and Mr. Weldon, who left the money to be invested for those particular prizes, had those two branches for their especial hobbies.”

“Not the least doubt in the world of it,” replied Reba, in a tone which seemed to declare her agreement to her friend’s statement as final and satisfactory. “But what I meant was, what do you think of them with reference to your chances of being one of the fortunate ones? You will try for them, of course?”

“There is no choice so far as the Weldon contest is concerned. You know the whole class must write, whether they want to or not. I wish I could be excused. I don’t like to write composition, and never did; so I’ll freely give you my chance for any prize,” replied Nora.

Edith sat at a little distance, helping one of the girls from a younger class to understand a problem in algebra. When the signs were to be changed, or, in fact, what was the use in changing them in any case, was

something that puzzled her exceedingly. But now Edith Hendry was making the matter somewhat plainer to her mind than it had ever been before.

The young teacher, however, stopped in the midst of her explanation to answer this last remark of her friend.

"You don't mean, Nora Read, that you are not going to try and do the best you can?" she asked.

"The best I can without too much trouble," answered Nora, with a light laugh.

"Then I think you would do well to give up your chance for one of the prizes to Reba Ashwood. For, if I am not mistaken, she will take any amount of trouble to make sure of capturing the first one," remarked Rob Senderling, who now joined the group in the centre of the room.

"Yes, sir, it won't be *my* fault if I don't take it," replied Reba, with a determined and significant shake of her head.

"Which one have you appropriated, Edith?" asked Rob, looking across to where the thoughtful face was bent over the slate again.

Edith stopped and looked up, with her pencil poised over the spot for the next figure.

"I have not gone quite so far as that yet, Rob ; but I shall do my best, and write the very best composition I am capable of. However, I should do that if there were no prizes at all."

"I declare, Edith Hendry. You are exasperatingly good !" said Reba, though still good naturedly. "But tell me honestly, isn't there somewhere in your make-up a little touch of vanity which would be pleased if you were really to carry off the first prize, notwithstanding that declaration of indifference ?"

"I certainly should not refuse to accept it if awarded to me, nor would I be indifferent to the honor; but, really, if I do the best I can, why should I feel badly if some one with greater talent does better?" she asked.

"Girls, you might as well, all of you, give up at once, so far as any hope of the Weldon Prize is concerned. Edith Hendry is going to take the first one, you may be sure of that," said Nora Read.

"Don't be too sure of that, my lady," replied Reba. "I shall not give up in any such faint-hearted style, and she will have to fight for it if she gets it."

"I shall not fight, I assure you; but I have no right to do less than my best," replied Edith, returning again to her slate and the girl beside her.

"If Edith takes the first and Reba the second, there will be nothing left but the poor, lonely little third for us boys," said Rob, glancing towards the window, where several of the other boys still stood. "What do you say—shall we try for that?"

"I haven't heard the report of the Committee of Award in regard to the second yet," replied one who evidently agreed with Nora in regard to the first. He said it with a laugh that made Reba feel uncomfortable. And then another added :

"As long as we must write, we may as well do ourselves justice."

"Are we to understand that you girls are going to leave the Foster Prize to be unmolested?" asked one of the boys, glancing in the direction of the most prominent figure in the other group.

Amy Goodwin, one of the girls near Reba, declared her intention of entering the contest. Reba was not altogether certain whether she should or not. Nora decidedly avowed her opinion that it "was too much

trouble." And indeed it would have been for Nora Read, since she had never taken the pains to do conscientious work through the term. And a prize for mathematics is not to be jumped at on Examination Day.

Edith was deep in her explanation again, and did not even hear the question. If she had, she would probably have given the same sort of answer that she had given before. Edith Hendry always did her best. It was a principle which she had not left out of her school life.

Presently the girl whom she had been helping looked up with intense satisfaction.

"Thank you, Edith. You have made it all quite plain. I think I understand it entirely now," she said.

"I am glad I was able to help you," replied Edith, heartily. And then the girl carried her slate and book to another part of the room, and ran out for the few remaining moments of intermission.

Edith joined the group of her friends.

"Edith, why do you always take the trouble of doing other people's work as well as your own? Any

one who is willing to be continually doing that will soon find her hands full," said Nora, idly.

"I did not do her work for her—that would not have been fair. I only explained the principle, so that she might do it for herself; and really it is no trouble to explain what one really understands one's self," said Edith, as she took the seat opposite.

"You wouldn't do it; would you, Nora Read?" asked Clayton Carmon, joining in the conversation for the first time. "You and Edith don't court trouble in the same way."

"Indeed we don't," assented Nora, shaking her pretty head and laughing, as if Clayton's words were really quite witty. Nora's was a pretty face when she laughed. The dimples played, and the color came and went rapidly over her pure, fair skin. Clayton rather enjoyed looking at her.

"You and I will shake hands on that," he rejoined. "I find one person about as much as I possibly can take care of, with any sort of justice."

"Your idea of justice may differ from some other persons," remarked Paul Elverton, seriously, though not at all unkindly.

Clayton did not like Paul Elverton. He flushed at his remark ; but before he could reply, Rob Senderling said, with a little unpleasant intonation in his voice :

“ You wouldn’t take care of that one, if you could help it, would you ? ”

“ Not if I could find anybody able and willing to do it for me,” replied Clayton, scarcely knowing in what light to take the question.

“ I’ve always thought there was a good deal of wisdom in the advice John Alden gave to Captain Standish, when the latter wanted to send ‘the strippling student’ to carry his message of love to the Puritan maiden Priscilla,” said Edith, thoughtfully.

“ What was that ? I don’t remember,” asked Clayton.

“ ‘If you wish a thing to be well done, you must do it yourself—you must not leave it to others,’ ” replied Edith.

“ Trust me for doing it myself in matters of that sort,” replied the young man, in a tone that showed how fully satisfied he was with himself.

A moment after the bell rang for order, and the group dispersed to their seats.

CHAPTER II.

A VERY ORDINARY PERSON.

IT was a principle in Edith Hendry's life to "do her best" in whatever she undertook. She and Reba Ashwood were born on the same day, the 14th of May. It was a custom in both families to observe birthdays by especial dinners and pleasant companies and thoughtful presents.

The day they were both fifteen years old, nearly two years before the April day on which we have first met them, each one received a present from her mother.

Edith's was a Teacher's Bible, just what she wanted. Reba's was a very handsome autograph album, bound in rich plush, and containing upon many of its pages a number of perfect little gems of art. This, too, was just what Reba had been wishing for.

Edith's mother had written her name on the fly leaf of her Bible, and below it a single sentence :

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee."

Reba's mother had written in her album the following verses :

" Wake, thou that sleepest in enchanted bowers,
Lest these lost years should haunt thee in the night
When Death is waiting for thy numbered hours
To take their swift and everlasting flight.
Wake ere the earth-born charm unnerve thee quite,
And be thy thought to work divine addressed :
Do something—do it soon—with all thy might.
An angel's wing would droop if long at rest,
And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest.
Go, make thyself of worth, and thus enlist
The smiles of all the good, the dear to fame.
'Tis infamy to die and not be missed,
Or let all soon forget that thou didst e'er exist.
Rouse to some work of high and holy love,
And thou an angel's happiness shalt know—
Shalt bless the earth : while in the world above
The good begun by thee shall onward flow
In many a branching stream, and wider grow.
The seed that in these few and fleeting hours
Thy hands, unsparing and unwearied sow,
Shall deck thy grave with amaranthine flowers,
And yield thee fruits divine in heaven's immortal bowers."

In the solitude of their own rooms that night these two girls looked again at their presents, and pondered thoughtfully over the words that were written there.

From her earliest childhood Edith had been trained

by wise encouragement and thoughtful, gentle reproof, to "do her best" in all things. A few months before this birthday a new motive had come into her heart and life. The love of God in its constraining power now influenced all her actions. That which before was an outgrowth of careful and judicious training was now the result of the promptings of a heart at one with God, and striving to become more and more like her Master.

It was at such a time as this, when all these new-born purposes were forming and taking root in her young nature, that the new Bible with its command written on the fly leaf was given to her.

She read it again most carefully.

"The gift?" she queried. "What gift? Does mother think I have a gift that ought not to be neglected? Who wrote this first, and to whom was it written? Let me see." And she turned to the concordance at the back of her Bible. (1 Tim. 4:14.) She found the place, and read it with her brow puckered with a thoughtful frown.

"But Timothy had a special gift, and for a special purpose," she mused after she had read again the

passage and its references. "How can this be applicable to me? I wonder if I have any gift? I can't preach as Timothy did. I can't write. I am not an elocutionist; I can't sing or paint, or even do fancy work. Reba Ashwood can do those sorts of things, but I cannot. I wonder what gift mother was thinking of when she wrote this, for I am very certain that I have no gift."

Just then Edith cast her eye a line or two further up, and read :

"Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

This was something that seemed a great deal more applicable to herself than the other. She was young, just fifteen to-day—and she had recently made a profession of faith. Why had not her mother written that, instead of the other verse?

She resolved to ask. Her mother's room was just across the hall; her father had gone to attend a meeting of the trustees of the church, and though it was growing rather late, she had not yet heard him return.

She threw a light shawl around her shoulders, and ran across to her mother's room.

She had the Bible with her, and her forefinger still marked the fourth chapter of Paul's first letter to the young disciple, Timothy.

"Mamma, what gift have I? And why wouldn't the twelfth verse have been more appropriate for me than the fourteenth?" she asked, when she had drawn a stool to her side, and had opened the Bible upon her mother's knee.

"My first intention was to put the twelfth verse," said her mother, "but, upon consideration, I changed my mind, and wrote the other. So you don't like it? I am sorry."

"I didn't mean that, mamma—you know I didn't mean that! But I don't see that I have any gift to neglect; and so I thought the other would be more appropriate," she said.

"Perhaps not exactly the same gift that Paul referred to here in Timothy; but does that prove that you have none at all?" asked her mother, smiling, as she stroked back the abundance of brown hair, now loosed from its usual orderly confinement.

"But, mamma, you know I can't preach, or write, or paint, or sing, or anything of that kind. I am a very ordinary sort of person, and it can't make a very great deal of difference to the world what I do, or leave undone."

She said the last with a sorry little smile—for no one enjoys being "a very ordinary sort of a person"—and sorrowfully meant just exactly what she had said. And she wondered if God could have in his kingdom any place for her, in which she could be of real and actual service, without these especial endowments that she had been looking upon as God's gifts.

Mrs. Hendry looked kindly down into the serious face. "I suppose if *everybody* preached and wrote and painted and sang, the preacher and writer and painter and singer would then become the 'very ordinary' people—don't you?" she asked.

Edith could not help laughing a little at that, and exclaimed: "I wonder who would listen and read, and admire, then?"

"Then, you see, God did about the right thing in distributing those kinds of gifts as he has," replied

Mrs. Hendry. "But, Edith, are you sure there are no others?"

"I don't know, mamma—I never thought about it. Are there?"

"Why are you here, my daughter? Has God nothing to do with that?"

"Oh, mamma!"

Edith sat perfectly still for several moments, taking in long, deep breaths, and slowly letting them go again, while the fact that had never come to her with such force as at this moment was growing more and more intense—that her very life was a gift from God.

"Yes, ma'am, I was wrong, I see," she presently said.

"Then there is another 'gift,' an infinitely higher one, that I trust has been given to you also. Can you think what that is, Edith?"

"The gift of God is eternal life," quoted the girl, after a moment's pause. "Is that what you mean, mamma?"

"Yes, dear. With these two gifts—physical life and life eternal—can you again say that you have nothing to neglect? But I'll tell you, Edith, just

why I put this verse instead of the one which you think would have been more appropriate. You will notice that the former is an exhortation to do certain things—to lead such a life in word and act, in charity, in faith, in purity, that it may be an example to other believers. A most worthy purpose it is, and one that I hope you will make your own. But this that I have chosen is on the negative side of the question, a warning *not* to do something—not to neglect God's gift. The sins of omission are less generally taken into account in our thoughts of life than sins of commission. We think about, and, if we are faithful, we do the things we are commanded to do, and then perhaps feel that we have performed, justly and honestly, our whole duty; but we are not so apt to look upon the other side and remember the things we neglect, or are disinclined to do. It was for sins of omission that Jesus reproved those Pharisees who were so particular to carry out the very letter of the law, and give tithes of all they possessed, even to the most trifling herbs, but who passed over, unheeding, judgment and justice and the love of God. 'These things,' he said, 'ought ye to have done, and not left

the other undone.' And do you remember, my darling, in Christ's description of the judgment, those who are sent away from the presence of the King are not thus banished because of any outcrying evil they have done, but for what they have *not* done. Read it, Edith, here in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew."

Mrs. Hendry turned the leaves, and Edith leaned thoughtfully over the volume and read the words her mother indicated.

"'Then shall he say unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was a hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. . . . Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.' I never thought of any such especial importance being attached to the things that we do not do, so long as the things that we did

were not bad," she said, after she had finished the reading.

"Your thought is the common one. How often, when a person has wandered from truth and duty, and done something wrong, we find the world crying out over his downfall; yet he may have lived for years constantly failing in other duties. In God's sight the absence of right is as great a sin as the presence of wrong; yet, if that same world makes any comment on such failure, it is only to say that 'Humanity is weak, and we cannot expect perfection in any one.' It is not because I see any special disposition in you, my dear, to neglect duty that I call your attention to these things. It is because I think the almost universal failing leans to the side of neglect, rather than to positive wrong-doing."

"I will try to remember, mamma," said Edith, as she looked back at the written text.

She kissed her mother, took up her Bible, and returned to her room.

"Well," she said, half aloud, "if the gift that I have is my life, and I am not to neglect it, I must make the best of it, the best of all of it, all the time."

Her prayer that night was in accordance with these new thoughts, and this was the secret of her "doing her best" in all that she undertook. She had been doing it now from principle for two years. In school and out of school it had been the same. She had never written a composition that was not the best composition she could write at that time. She had never taken up a new rule in arithmetic until she fully understood the one she was leaving—there had been faithful, conscientious work in it all.

She looked on the wonderful gifts of life and life eternal as priceless gifts, for which she must render an account, and which she must in no wise neglect.

CHAPTER III.

TWO NOT "VERY ORDINARY" PERSONS.

REBA ASHWOOD carried her beautiful album to her room that night. Like her friend Edith, she read again and again the words that were traced there.

They were high and noble sentiments; but Reba Ashwood read them with an earthward vision. She did not, could not, see the highest and noblest in them.

She knew, experimentally, nothing whatever of the lofty and pure motive which now actuated Edith Hendry.

Her home training had been different from Edith's. Her parents were neither of them Christians. They were educated, and refined, and moved in excellent society. Of course, they attended church, and, when the children were younger, had sent them to Sunday-school; and they gave to nearly all the humane and benevolent causes that were brought to

their notice. They were invariably spoken of as being very fine people ; but the atmosphere of religion was not in Reba's home.

Instead, the ruling thought there referred to worldly gain and fame, to worldly learning and refinement, and the worldly precedence to be gained thereby.

Mrs. Ashwood, perhaps, could hardly have told what prompted her to write this particular selection. She thought it beautiful ; but she, as well as Reba, failed to gain the high inspiration that a Christian would have found in them. She, too, read with an earthward vision.

This did not prevent Reba's impulsive nature being stirred as she read them again ; and she said, with determination :

"I will indeed do something. The years even of my early life shall not be lost years. I will make myself of worth in the world ; and when I leave it, I shall be missed. People shall remember me as a blessing. The good shall smile upon me. Yes, and fame shall be mine ! I will not disappoint you, my mother !"

So declared Reba Ashwood ; and she meant what

she said. Just how she was going to accomplish all this, she did not stop to inquire ; nor did she even ask what she was going to do in the world. Still, she was perfectly sure she was going to *do* something !

She went to bed that night with her head full of the wonderful possibilities—nay, almost certainties, as they already appeared to her—of the future. What a glorious thing it was to live, when living was going to make the whole world in some way the gainer by this life, and at the same time one could lift oneself to the very pinnacle of fame ! The smiles of the good and the blessings of earth should be hers ; and amaranthine flowers should deck the grave of so blessed a memory ! Yes, she would “do something.”

In accordance with that night’s resolve, Reba Ashwood had been doing something—doing it with all her might—ever since.

For the last six months she had given herself unreservedly to music. She arose early, and retired late, in order to practice. The piano was always in requisition, and she executed all sorts of outlandish vocal gymnastics, in season and out of season, until every body in the house wished—nay more, asked, and fairly

begged her to desist. Mrs. Ashwood never could have a quiet afternoon's nap if Reba were in the house ; and Mr. Ashwood declared he would burn the piano, if his night's rest were not left undisturbed.

She felt that her proficiency, as well as her steady perseverance and her high aim, were undervalued. Still, she looked upon this as a part of the necessary persecution which must attend the noblest and best deeds of all lofty souls ; and she patiently pursued her way, cheered by the thought that in the future, though not now, they would appreciate both her and her talent. She knew she had heard about a prophet not having honor in his own country ; and she looked forward to the time when the world should pay its tribute of honor to her as the great musician who had won the hearts of the people. She would be very gracious to these same home-folks, who in the days of her struggle had failed to appreciate her, or to understand her soul's longing after something beyond this little sphere which constituted their world, but could not satisfy her.

The fact that her father allowed her to take lessons of whom she chose, and unquestioningly paid all her

music bills, did not seem to her at present a matter demanding especial consideration or gratitude. If she thought of it at all, it was with the certainty that she should more than repay him in the future by the honor that should come to him as the father of so accomplished a singer as she undoubtedly would be some day.

Before this there had been a period when painting occupied her time and thoughts, and then one of poetry writing—at least she called it poetry—but the greater part of what she wrote was mere trash.

Now, however, she had given up the idea of ever becoming a famous poetess, or a world-renowned painter; and all the zeal that had hitherto been given to these pursuits was concentrated upon music.

Recently the honors of the approaching Examination and Commencement had somewhat diverted her mind even from music. Of course, it would not do to live altogether in the future, when there were honors near at hand to be reaped. She had not the slightest doubt about that future; she felt that her whole soul uprose to the call of music as the great “something” that she was to do in the world. For

the present, however, she would relax her efforts in that direction long enough to compete for this Weldon Prize.

So the something that Reba Ashwood was doing just at present, and into which she was putting all her might and thought and purpose—the something in which she was determined she would be successful—was to take the first prize for composition at the Commencement, and to graduate with particular honor.

It was rather trying to have Edith Hendry say, in that quiet, determined way of hers, that she should “do her best”; for all the school knew that Edith Hendry’s best was no mean attempt. Still, Reba Ashwood knew that she was a more brilliant writer than her friend. Edith gave more conscientious care to her work; but there was a brightness and sparkle that seemed to come natural to Reba. Perhaps Edith was more accurate in her statements, but beautiful and well-rounded sentences came more easily to Reba. To have compared their compositions for the past two years though, a vast improvement would have been found in Edith’s from the beginning, while Reba’s

were but little better now than then. Depending upon the advantage which she was conscious of possessing, Reba felt very little anxiety concerning the final issue.

Nora Read had already voluntarily made over her right to any of the prizes, and it was as well. Nora had spoken truly when she had declared that "trouble" of any sort was irksome to her.

She was a pretty little creature, this Nora Read—small and dainty of figure, graceful, willowy, and light in all her movements. Her features were fair and delicately chiseled—so delicately, in fact, that had it not been for the conch-shell pink which tinged cheek and ear, and deepened into cherry-red at the lips, she would have had the appearance of ill-health. Her eyes were large and blue, and her face was surrounded and crowned by an abundance of wavy yellow hair, which the sunlight turned into a coronet of shining gold.

Nora Read knew just how pretty she was. Her glass told her that whenever she looked in it, and that was very often. She had also heard it said by others, ever since she could remember.

Perhaps she depended upon this beauty to carry her through life; at least she was much indisposed to make any sort of effort to improve herself. How she had managed to reach the senior year of the academy was almost a marvel to herself, and certainly it was to many who knew her. Still, somehow, she was there; and this year she would graduate, and leave the tiresome school days behind her forever. She was heartily glad of this, and she promised to give herself no more trouble than was necessary to reach that happy point in her existence.

So, although by the rules of the school, the entire class must submit an essay for competition for the Weldon Prize, she left the writing of hers to the very last moment, while she indulged her ease-loving nature in the luxury of idleness. Reba Ashwood had written, corrected, re-written, and discarded a dozen essays, and Edith Hendry had thought and prayed much, and covered several sheets with carefully-written and carefully-corrected sentences, before Nora Read had even set pen to paper.

Nora, in her lady-like, idle fashion, often laughed at her two friends, for their very different views of

life. She "did not see the use of bothering." They chided her sometimes, but she laughed at their reproofs; and, after all, she was so sweet and pretty and good-natured, that they could not do otherwise than love her, even while they saw her error, and from their different standpoints grieved over her failures.

But, after all, it did not seem so much like a failure in her unruffled life. She did not want a prize; she did not want fame. She did not care about anything in the world that she did not have—at least, she was not conscious of any want.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMMENCEMENT AND PAUL ELVERTON.

NOT one of those boys or girls will ever forget the day of their graduation from the Hallberg Academy. Days of infinitely greater importance may come to them. Nevertheless, that beautiful June day will ever hold its distinctive place in each of their memories.

There were seventeen in the class this year. We must now be introduced to one who joined but slightly in the conversation that has been already recorded. Paul Elverton was at least six years older than the average of the class. Therefore, some of the others looked upon him as especially backward. This was, however, far from the truth. His early school advantages had been very slight, and it was only by persistent and determined efforts that he had been able to enter the Academy. Pecuniary disabilities and entire lack of sympathy upon the part of those by whom he was surrounded, had only proved a spur to his deter-

mination, and had at length been overcome by him. Thus, at the age at which most boys were ready to leave school, he was ready to enter it.

Like Paul, the apostle of old, Paul Elverton was absorbed in "this one thing I do." This nineteenth century Paul had become a disciple of Christ while still but a young lad, and soon after he had attended a course of lectures on "The Cradle of the Race," delivered by a medical missionary who had returned to this country from Armenia. This missionary told, in graphic terms, of the work to be done among the perishing multitudes of that far-off land. He spoke of their pitiable destitution of anything like medical skill, and said that as Christ, while ministering to the wants of the body often opened the way for the richest spiritual blessings, so the medical missionary, through his knowledge of the healing art, was often able to reach the souls of many who would not otherwise be accessible to his influence. He told how the "medicine man" was welcomed where the missionary could not gain admittance, if his errand were only to tell the story of the cross.

The desire seized Paul Elverton to bear the tidings

of Christ's salvation to his fellow-men across the sea, and to unite with this the work of relief and healing to the suffering. But what could he, a poor, unlettered boy, do ?

Truly, the case seemed hopeless then ; but from that moment he never once lost sight of this purpose. Everything was made subservient to it ; everything was done with a view to this in the future ; and to-day he had so far advanced in his purpose as to be able to take his place—and it was no mean place, as far as scholarship was concerned—among the graduating class of the Hallberg Academy.

Not that he had now by any means fully attained his object. The three years of the medical course were yet before him ; and after that there were theological studies to pursue ; but he felt that what, with God's help, he had already done, was an earnest of what, with a continuation of the divine favor, he might yet accomplish.

But at twenty-five years of age, and ready to graduate, he was still, so far as pecuniary means were concerned, about as destitute as when he was a boy.

He was of medium height, slender of build, but

with a quiet determination upon his face, and older than any of the others.

He knew that the greater part of the graduating class would wear black suits ; but, before the important day dawned, he had fully made up his mind that he was not going to care in the least that his clothes were only a gray business suit. Still, it was somewhat of an ordeal for him.

Nora smiled superciliously, and Reba tossed her head as Paul came up on the platform, and the latter laid her hand on Edith Hendry's arm, and called her attention to him, whispering :

“ Doesn't he look strange among all those others ? ”

At this moment Paul was looking over toward the girls, trying to convince himself that he felt perfectly comfortable in his gray suit. What he saw was that Nora laughed at him, and Reba tossed her head in an indefinite, and, to his sensitiveness, a very unpleasant way ; but he caught Edith's steady eyes upon him. She was looking across to the group with a thoughtful brow. She smiled and nodded a pleasant “ Good-morning ” to Paul. He returned the salutation—the first really polite—and cordial one that had come to

him from any member of his class that morning—and somehow he drew his breath more easily after that.

Edith Hendry little thought that by a simple act of courtesy she had helped a brother to bear his burden that morning.

It was now time for the exercises to commence, and one after another the essays were read, or orations delivered. One of the boys had the Salutatory; Edith Hendry was Valedictorian, and Reba Ashwood Historian of the class, while each one of the others had a part to perform.

After this the entire seventeen stood in a semicircle upon the enlarged platform, before the Faculty of the Academy, to receive their diplomas.

During the delivery of his own oration, Paul Elverton had caught another frank, encouraging look from Edith Hendry's eyes, and he knew that he spoke to at least one who appreciated him.

The diplomas were given, and then came the announcement of the award of prizes.

A very dignified-looking committee had had this matter in charge. Of course, everybody, including everybody's friends, was intensely interested now.

The Foster Prize for Mathematics was announced first. The chairman of the dignified committee rose and announced that "the Foster Prize, after due examination and consideration, had been awarded to Mr. Paul Elverton."

Paul Elverton was probably the only one among that entire seventeen who had not some near and dear friend in the audience. So, instead of somebody rapturously exclaiming: "Oh, it is *our Paul!*!" they only said, as he went forward to take the envelope which, everybody knew, contained thirty dollars in gold: "Why, it is that young man in gray"; while Nora Read whispered to Edith Hendry: "I never thought of *his* taking a prize—did you?"

Edith had been one of three girls who had tried for the Mathematical Prize; but, although her own failure was thus announced, she spoke her congratulation to the successful one as heartily as a smile could speak across the platform. The young man in gray caught her glance as he turned after taking the prize from the committeeman's hand; but he did not know then what he learned afterward, that she had tried for it, and failed.

All thoughts were now turned to the prizes for Composition. There were three of these, so the announcement of the first, and even of the second, would not put hope quite away from those who remained. The first name on the little list that the chairman held was read out, "Miss Edith Hendry."

There was a murmur of approval. Everybody who knew Edith expected her to take at least one of these prizes, though, it must be confessed, Reba Ashwood looked somewhat disappointed : she had felt sure of this first prize herself.

But what name was that he was reading now ?

The second best composition had been written by "Miss Reba Ashwood."

Reba could afford to smile now, and she drew her breath freely again. After all, it was not so bad to take the second prize, when the first had been awarded to such a person as Edith Hendry. The third went to the young man who was doubtful whether "it was worth while to bait for such small fry." However, he took it now, with a little flush of satisfaction that he had fairly earned it. After that several other names were read as deserving of "honorable mention."

Prayer was then offered by one of the pastors of Hallberg. After the prayer the exercises were over, and the graduates were free to receive the congratulations of their friends.

Paul Elverton escaped from the happy company at his earliest opportunity. It had been a trying day to him ; but by his bedside that night he thanked God for his sustaining grace, and for at least one ray of sunlight that had gleamed upon him all through the day.

CHAPTER V.

THREE GIRLS TALKING OVER THE FUTURE.

“WELL, girls, now that schooldays are over,
and we are prepared to enter upon life,
what are you going to do?”

Commencement Day had been numbered among the things that were for the space of nearly two weeks. The three girls were walking together. Reba walked in the centre—she generally did. She was, by several inches, taller than Edith, and Edith was taller than Nora. People who passed often remarked: “What a fine-looking girl!” Reba knew perfectly well that she was fine looking. She knew that her brown eyes were bright and fringed with dark lashes, while the brows above them were well defined and quite as heavy as could be becoming a girl’s face. Her hair was dark and very abundant. It was always arranged in some becoming fashion, and was in general taken as a model for the other girls in school to follow.

In matters of dress Reba was very particular, joining neatness with extreme style in a manner not often seen. Style was a great deal to Reba Ashwood. If Madam Fashion said, "Wear large hats," Reba wore the largest hat that could be purchased. If the demand was for small bonnets, Reba's was scarcely more than a tiny head-dress.

She wore a pretty, light silk, and a large, black straw hat, jauntily turned up at one side—a hat in which many a girl would have looked bold, but which set off Reba's bright face most becomingly.

Edith walked on her right. There was nothing noticeable in Edith's appearance. She was very neat and lady-like in manner; her eyes were gray and her hair brown, her figure slight, and her dress very quiet. Nobody ever thought of calling her pretty. But those who knew her well found rest in her quiet smile, and liked to look into her clear, steady eyes for sympathy and love.

It was Reba who asked the question with which this chapter opens. She usually began such discussions, and both her listeners were ready with a reply. Nora Read shook out the folds of her pale-blue

cashmere dress, with its abundant trimming of blue ribbons and white lace ; turned her cuff around so that the Rhine stone in her sleeve-button would catch the sunlight ; settled her gold bracelet upon her dainty wrist, and answered, complacently :

“ I suppose I shall follow the destiny which seems to be marked out for all our sex—shall marry, and settle down to an establishment of my own. I mean to have a lovely house, with well-trained servants and everything easy. When you get tired of the empty applause of the world, Reba, come and see me, and rest a while.”

Edith’s answer was very different, in substance and in tone :

“ I mean to try to do the best I can wherever God puts me.”

Reba had very little belief in the particular leadings of Providence, and she had no answer to make to this. Indeed, she was herself already full of an answer to the question she had proposed, and she scarcely waited for Edith’s sentence to be finished when she turned to the little, laughing creature by her side, and remarked, with a strong emphasis :

"Married, indeed ! That seems to be the sole thought of some girls. I promise you *I* shall not marry. I tell you, girls, I think that a woman shuts herself away from her highest possibility of good the day she resigns her liberty and becomes a slave to any man!"

"A slave ! Who said anything about being a slave ? I assure you there is no slavery in my plans," said Nora, somewhat indignantly.

"You spoke of being a wife, and there is little difference," Reba replied, with the assurance which ignorance often assumes.

"Reba Ashwood, I cannot imagine where you get your ideas of marriage. Not from personal observation, surely. Your mother is not a slave, and mine is not; but they are both of them happy and useful wives," said Nora.

"Of course. I did not refer to either of them," exclaimed Reba, hastily retreating from her former position. "But I feel that my sphere is to be a wider one. The longings of my soul never could be satisfied in so narrow a circle ; and, as I said, I feel that a woman of genius, of high and lofty aims, shuts her-

self away from the highest possibilities of good the day she marries." She nodded her head and compressed her lips, in a way peculiar to herself, as she delivered this opinion.

"Reba," said Edith, quietly, "what a pity you were not in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were first created!"

"Well, what now?" she asked.

"Why, for the highest possible good of womanhood in all future ages. You might, you know, have advised against the marriage of Eve to Adam," answered Edith, very seriously.

"Edith Hendry, I don't profess to be a Christian; but I am really shocked at your want of reverence," said Reba, severely.

"But you are not shocked in the least at your own, I suppose?" responded Edith.

"My own? I have not been irreverent. What did I say that was irreverent?"

"I only put your thought into plainer language. God created mankind, and put him here with everything to make him happy and useful. He instituted marriage. Presumably he knew what he was doing,

and did it for the best. But in your opinion he made a mistake. A woman's highest good is not attained by the plan he proposes. It is better for her not to marry," replied Edith, in a quiet tone.

"Edith Hendry, you do have the most ridiculous way of putting things," said Reba, rather uncomfortably—the more so, perhaps, because the little friend on the other side thoroughly enjoyed the situation, and was laughing heartily at her expense.

"Then you acknowledge that it is only a different 'putting' of the same thing?" Edith asked.

"I am not sure that I do. But, really, I did not know you were so deeply interested in this subject. You seem to have given it considerable study, and speak as if it were a personal matter. When do you expect to send out your invitations, and who is the fortunate suitor for your favor?" asked Reba, resorting to ridicule in order to change the subject.

"You know better than that, Reba," replied Edith, with quiet reproof. "I do not know that the invitations will ever be sent out. I just told you that I meant to do the best I could wherever God places me. I do not know yet where that will be. If it is by

the side of some noble worker for the Lord, I will try to be his helper, his inspiration to yet nobler and higher attainments. If it is alone, I will try, with God's help, to do the duty he gives me alone."

The three girls walked a little distance in silence. Then Reba, not quite willing to give up her position without a struggle, asked, in an argumentative tone :

"Why, then, are so many marriages unhappy? and why do so many prove—for you must admit this, Edith—a hindrance to the noblest work? I have seen it over and again, and so have you."

"It would be very foolish to attempt to prove that the ordinance which God instituted for the best good of mankind has been kept as he gave it through all these ages," replied Edith. "If you had said at first what you say now—that in many cases the result of marriage is not all that could be desired, I should not have answered as I did. But indeed, Reba, you have a habit of making your assertions far too sweeping."

"And you have a habit of taking my words, and looking at them on all sides, as if life or death depended upon them," replied Reba, with an odd mixture of impatience and raillery.

"Life does sometimes depend on words. If upon our lips they lose their proper significance, we have done the world a deep injury and ourselves a lasting harm," replied Edith. She spoke seriously, though not with the air of one who would dictate, or harshly reprove.

"I declare, you make me feel as if I had been to a funeral," said Nora, who did not like the conversation to take this turn. "Who would imagine that the discussion started from marriage? But come, Reba, now that you know what both of us expect to do, tell us of your plans."

That was exactly what Reba wanted to do; and thus good feeling was restored at once. Her plans had been somewhat modified, however, during the past few weeks.

"I have been thinking, since I became so interested in writing my Commencement Essay, and the one for the Weldon Prize, and particularly since the former was so favorably noticed in the papers, and the latter was one of the successful ones in the contest, that perhaps I ought not to devote so much time to music. Of course, I do not mean to give it up, and I still

expect some day to turn it to account ; but I feel there may be other things which demand a part of my time and attention. The pen, you know, my friends," —they had reached the gate before Reba's home now, and she stepped forward from between the two girls, and, turning, struck an attitude before them—"is mightier than the sword, and who knows what a conqueror I may yet be with that weapon? However, the human voice is yet mightier than the pen ; and I expect, with my voice, to achieve my greatest victory. Will you come in, girls?"

"Thank you, no," replied Edith. "Mother has some work that I can help in. It seems so odd to be doing any other than school work. So long as that lasted, mother never expected anything from me ; but now it is time to take up something else."

"And I expect a caller this evening. I must go home and rest awhile before it is time to dress to receive him," said Nora, blushing most becomingly, and laughing gayly.

And the three girls who looked into the future with such different purposes parted for the present.

CHAPTER VI.

PLANS AND AIMS OF THREE YOUNG MEN.

AT the same time, three young men were discussing almost the same theme from their different stand point.

They were not such close friends as the girls, and thus the dispositions and plans of each were not already so familiar to the others.

The three were Paul Elverton, Rob Senderling, and Clayton Carmon. Rob and Clayton were neither of them in the habit of talking very much with Paul. To-day, however, they overtook their classmate, who, somehow, had grown somewhat more important—at least, in Rob's estimation—since he had taken that prize for mathematics; he had tried for it himself, and thus understood something of the faithful work it represented.

Paul was walking very leisurely when the others came up to him.

“Have you your plans laid for the future?” Rob.

asked, after the usual greetings of the day had been exchanged.

"They are just the same as before," replied Paul, unmindful of the fact that the enterprise of good which he had—

"Contemplated till it had possessed his mind,
Become his study, pastime, rest and food,
And kindled in his heart a flame refined,
With thoughts all fixed and feelings purely kind,"

was not known to them.

"Then you have already settled upon a course in life?" queried Rob.

"Yes; oh, yes! Since before I entered the Academy. Indeed, I am not sure that otherwise I should have taken the course, though I do not undervalue its worth for any sphere in life. I am going to study medicine now, as soon as the Lord opens the way for me," replied Paul.

"Medicine, eh?" asked Clayton, with quizzical surprise. "Well, now, I never thought of you as a professional man. 'Paul Elverton, Medical Doctor.' That does not sound so bad, does it? Not the least doubt, Rob, but we shall have the opportunity of

being proud of our classmate yet. Where do you expect to hang out your shingle, doctor?"

"Wherever the Lord needs me most. Very probably in Armenia," Paul replied simply.

"In Armenia?" asked the two, in surprised unison.

"Why, man, what on earth do you mean?" continued Rob.

"Just what I say. I have been thinking of it so long myself that it did not occur to me that it would surprise any one else. But it is all the Lord's world, you know."

"But Armenia! Why do you want to bury yourself-away off there where nobody will ever hear of you again? Why not settle here, or in the city near by, where you'll have a chance of rising? Though I believe with your determination and honest work, you will rise wherever you are put," added Rob, with cordial praise.

"I had not thought of studying medicine that I might become famous," replied Paul. "In going to Armenia I can let some of those poor, perishing ones hear of the Lord Jesus."

"So that is your trim, is it?" said Clayton Car-

mon, giving a long, low disagreeable whistle. "I had really no idea you were so exceedingly goody-goody as this comes to ; though, of course, I always set you down for one of the saints."

"I regret that I have not fully met your expectations. Even if my life falls short, it is still the aim of my heart to be one of the Lord's 'holy ones,'" replied Paul.

"Indeed ! Well, I am afraid if you knew me better, you would feel yourself contaminated by my presence ; so I'll relieve you of it. I am going for a row on the creek. Will you come with me, Rob?"

They had reached the corner of a street leading toward the creek as he spoke, and he turned in that direction.

"Not this afternoon, Clayt," replied Rob, who was really much interested in what Paul had been saying, as well as in Paul himself.

Clayton went off alone, and the other two pursued their way together. Rob was not willing that the conversation should drop, and resumed it as if there had been no interruption.

"A medical missionary is what you will be then, I

suppose. I have heard that they have wonderful opportunities for helping the people."

"Yes, the poor benighted creatures in many of those Eastern lands know as little about medicine as they do about Christ Jesus, and while curing the body there is an opportunity to bring soul-healing too. It is a work that needs laborers."

"You seem possessed by a single idea," remarked Rob, looking into the serious face.

"If a man carries out honorably and faithfully any one purpose in life, I believe he will have little time to dabble with others. It was an older and a wiser Paul than I who concentrated his efforts, saying, '*This one thing I do.*'" And a very happy but determined smile broke over his features, transforming them into that deep beauty which comes as the result of purity of purpose and heart.

"However, the One whom both you and that other Paul take for your example did a great many things in his life," said Rob, for the sake of argument.

"Nothing, however, incongruous with the one great purpose of his life. Not an act did he perform in all those thirty-three years that did not in some way look

toward the cross and the resurrection. ‘Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?’ are the first recorded words from his lips, and ‘I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do’ is a part of his last prayer. Where can you find a record that approaches that of the Lord Jesus in concentration and consecration of purpose and determination of execution?”

Rob cleared his throat, and began to whittle a stick he had picked up from the ground. The young men had walked beyond the limits of the city proper, and were now sitting upon a rude bench beneath the shade of a drooping willow.

The conversation was becoming more serious than Rob had intended, even though he had himself led it on.

“Probably all that you say is true, but you know I make no profession of religion myself,” he answered, as if thus excused entirely from any responsibility. Many people seem to have the strange idea that if they make no *profession* of doing right, they are thereby relieved from the obligation.

Paul looked with clear, thoughtful, interested eyes at the youth before him.

"I wish that you did, however," he said.

"Come, now," said Rob, trying to laugh. "Don't look at me in that way. I am not such a terrible sinner. I never did anything so very wicked in my whole life."

"Are you sure?"

"Why, of course I am!"

"Perhaps your principal sin, then, lies in what you have *not* done," suggested Paul, without once moving his steady gray eyes from his companion's.

Rob still tried to laugh; but under that steady gaze, he succeeded very poorly.

"I wonder what you expect of a fellow? I go to church regularly; I am said to be even *too* generous to the poor. But the fact is, I can't bear to see anybody suffering. I learned the Commandments as soon as I could speak plainly; and, so far as I know, I have kept every one of them."

"That is much such a record as that of the young man whom, when Jesus beheld, he loved," replied Paul. "But the Lord told him, 'one thing thou lackest.' He had never followed Christ as his disciple."

"Do you mean to say that all the good he had done

went for nothing?" asked Rob, though he could have answered that question himself.

"I don't mean to tell you anything upon my own authority. The Bible teaches us that it is the negatives which keep men out of heaven. A man has only to 'neglect so great salvation' to be lost. It is not merely because we believe and act upon something desperately wrong; but because we 'believe *not* in the Son of God' that we are condemned. It is true that if our hearts were not filled with ingratitude and sinfulness we would not neglect—we would believe. Now, my dear boy, if you would be lost forever, you need make no effort; all you have to do is to *neglect* Christ. Pay attention to everything else in the world, but neglect the love which came from heaven to save you—you need do nothing more."

"But I don't want to be lost—nobody that I can hear of wants to be lost," replied Rob, earnestly adding, "only I don't see that there's any desperate hurry about the matter."

"That is just what we have been speaking of—neglect. We none of us know whether to-morrow, or next week, or next year, holds life or death for us.

Besides, the invitation ‘Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call upon him while he is near,’ contains, by implication, a terrible warning ; there may come a time when he may not be found. And a very important consideration is, that if we keep putting this matter off from year to year until our lives are well nigh spent, even if through God’s grace we then secure an entrance into heaven, we shall have through all eternity to look back upon wasted time, in which we should have served Christ.’’

Rob was deeply moved, more than he cared to admit, though he could not altogether conceal it. He rose and turned homeward.

Paul walked beside him, but it was in silence. He felt that all had been said upon that subject that it was best to say at present ; but as he walked beside his friend, he lifted his heart in earnest prayer that God would bless and prosper the seed that had been sown.

After an interval of silence, Paul asked, pleasantly :

“I have told you my plans for the future. May I not know yours ?”

" You know Clayt's father and mine are in business together. They have offered to take us both, and I presume I shall go into the store. If he also decides to do so, we shall be fellow-clerks. I rather think, however, that at present he is disinclined to accept the position."

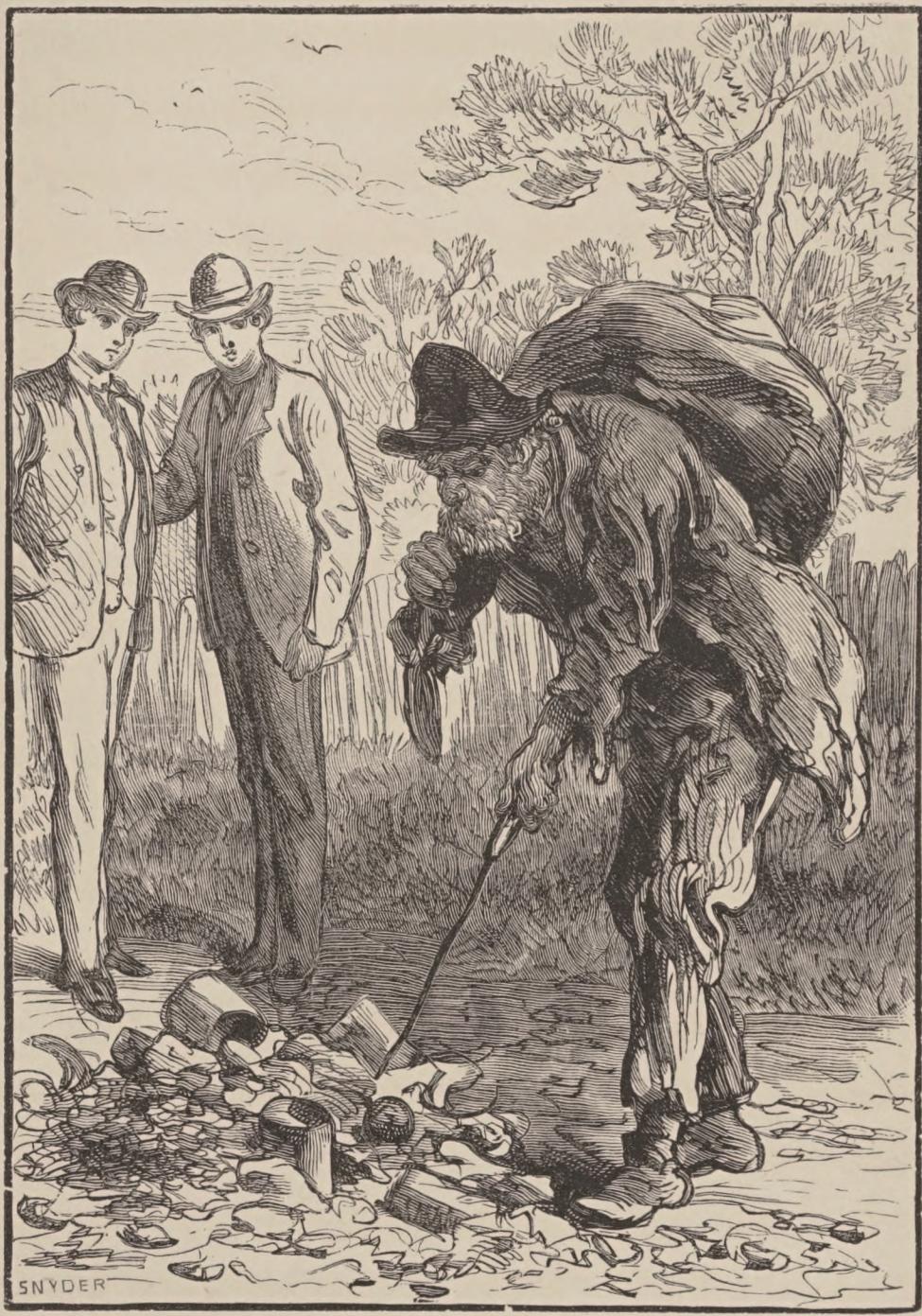
" Why? I should think that was a good opening. With your own fathers, you would have good opportunity to rise, as you show yourselves worthy and capable. But perhaps he has a fancy for some other kind of work?"

Rob shrugged his shoulders, and made a comical little grimace.

" So far as I have observed, Clayton Carmon has no fancy for anything that bears the remotest resemblance to work," he said.

" But a man, one who is worthy of the name, must do something in the world. God himself worked. Christ refers to that: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' and man, to be a man, must work at something," said Paul.

" So his father tells him—at least, so far as the necessity for his own work is concerned—and insists



His Choice.

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upon his choosing something to which to devote himself. Mr. Carmon has told father that he would much prefer taking his son into their business, and, as you say, he would give him every possible opportunity to rise; still, if he prefers something else, he is willing to help him in whatever he may decide upon. Clayt has, therefore, talked over almost every business and profession under the sun—except perhaps the vocation of some such poor fellows as that.” And Rob nodded in the direction of an old, forlorn-looking ragpicker, who with a long stick was probing into the depths of a box of ashes.

A few bits of dirty rags, and one or two other articles, which seemed mere trash, were transferred from the ash-box to a torn and dirty bag. Then the bag was shouldered again, and the pitiable fellow moved on to the next ash-barrel.

The two young men looked after him, but with very different thoughts.

“I wonder why the lower walks of life are kept so full all the time? Some people certainly have a strange choice,” said Rob.

“Do you believe, when that fellow was your age,

he deliberately *chose* to be a ragpicker?" asked Paul.

"Why should he be one now, if he had not chosen it? I have no patience with the doctrine of fate. I believe that every man is the architect of his own fortunes. I cannot conceive of any possible combination of circumstances which could sink me to that pitiable level." And Rob drew his manly young form up to his fullest extent.

"Neither can I," replied Paul, looking up into his face; for, though so much younger, Rob was by several inches the taller of the two. "But the ground for my faith is not because you do not choose to be a rag-picker, but because you do choose to be something else. I am sure that man did not make a deliberate and decided choice of his present occupation. If we were to ask him, I am almost positive we should find that he simply did not intelligently and positively choose anything higher. He made no choice that would lead to active effort. He probably now wishes that he were something different; but wishing is not choosing—and we must choose."

"Perhaps you are right," assented Rob, thought-

fully, while they watched the farther efforts of the poor creature, who was now poking at something in the gutter to put in his collection.

Half a square in advance of them was the street down which Paul must turn. Neither spoke again until its corner was reached. Then Paul extended his hand, saying :

“The rule, you see, works pretty much the same in all the affairs of life. A soul need not deliberately choose to be lost ; one need only *neglect* the offer of salvation. And a man need not choose to occupy the lowest walks of life, he need only neglect to fit himself for anything higher. We must all aim high if we don’t want to fall low. And we must aim with a steady, determined, conscientious purpose. Good-bye, Rob, I am glad I met you this afternoon.”

Paul wrung the hand that he held with a cordial grasp, and then turned and thoughtfully strode down the street, with the prayer in his heart that God would bless this boy and make him to decide aright in matters of the greatest import.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAYTON CARMON'S VIEWS.

ROB stood a moment looking after the retreating figure.

"I believe he is right," he said, half aloud. "One thing is certain: he has a purpose, and I believe he is going to accomplish it. His aim is high—it reaches heaven itself. So far as this life is concerned, my aim is high too. I'll work early, and late, and faithfully too. I'll be a rich man, and I'll do good with my wealth. I'll be my father's partner one of these days; and, when he is old, I will be his successor in the most successful business house in the city. I am willing to work hard in youth, that I may attain and appreciate rest in my old age. But as for the other—I believe Paul is right there too; but I can't decide upon that just now. There's time enough, anyway."

He walked slowly along. He was on the principal thoroughfare of the city now, and going toward his

father's store. So absorbed was he in his thoughts that he did not hear a footstep behind him, nor heed the near presence of any one, until Clayton Carmon took his arm with the remark :

"Humph ! you look exactly as if that young upstart had been trying his skill in converting you."

Rob started, and flushed a little. Should he tell Clayton what had been the subject of his conversation with Paul, and of his own thoughts ? One look into the gay, sneering face convinced him that it would be worse than useless ; so he made no answer, but merely remarked :

" You couldn't have had a very long row on the creek ? "

" I didn't find anybody who wanted to take an oar, and it is too much trouble to do all the rowing one's self. What did you and the Professor find to talk about ? It seems to have interested you most deeply."

" You are mistaken. I have not met him this afternoon," replied Rob.

" What ? Haven't met whom ? "

" The Professor. You seem to imagine yourself to be my confessor."

"Oh, come, now! You know to whom I refer, Professor Paul Elverton, M. D. What did he talk about?"

"Well, for one thing, you."

"Indeed! I feel honored. But I was not aware that he knew anything about me."

"He did not, I think, until I told him."

"Then it was you who did the talking. Well, we're getting at the bottom of it now. What did you say about me, then?"

"I told him of the opening for both of us in the store, and that if you accepted we should be fellow-clerks. But I added that you seemed disinclined to do so."

"For which disinclination I suppose I incurred his lasting displeasure," remarked Clayton, with a haughty toss of his head. "However, I imagine I can live through that. Have you made up your mind, then, to go into the store, Rob?"

"Yes, I have; and I think we ought to be thankful that we have fathers who can put us at once in such good positions," remarked Rob, with an emphasis he probably would not have thought of before his talk with Paul.

"Good positions, indeed! A paltry clerkship, to measure off dress goods and tell the prices of the latest imported novelties! If you call that a good position, I'd like to know what you would call a poor one. If father had offered me anything worth doing —to take me in as junior partner, or even to give me the head bookkeeper's place, I should have considered it. But I was not born for a clerk, and I won't be one—that much is decided."

"I mean to be partner in the business one of these days," replied Rob, confidently.

"Indeed? Has your father offered you that? I wonder, then, why my father wants to keep me down to a paltry clerkship? I thought the positions offered us were the same. I am sure father said so."

"So they are."

"What do you mean then by saying you are going to be a partner?"

"I didn't say I was going to enter the business as partner now. I don't know enough, and should probably make sorry work if I were there at present—but I mean to be a partner one day."

"How are you going to be sure of it?"

“I am going to be faithful and honest, and learn all I can wherever I am put to work. I will try to make myself worthy of advancement ; and then, when there is an opening above me, I shall be ready to step up to it. I should really think it very strange if either of our fathers were to set aside tried and faithful men who have worked themselves up to higher positions, in order to put us in them, with our little knowledge and less experience. I’m going to climb there by my own efforts ; if I can’t, I shall not deserve to be there at all.”

“Oh, ho!” said Clayton, mockingly. “Noble sentiments—noble ! Have you any more to spare ?”

“No,” said Rob, in a voice that he held in check, as he did not want his anger to get the better of him. “It was what Paul Elverton said this afternoon that led me to make this resolve.”

“Ah, indeed ? He must have been really eloquent ; and it is quite probable I shall never know how much I missed by refusing to stay with you.”

They had reached the point where they must separate to go to their homes, and Rob was not sorry ; for the cool impudence and frivolous indifference of

Clayton annoyed him almost beyond calm endurance. Before they parted, however, he asked :

“But honestly, Clayt, what are you going to do?”

“I am going to have just as jolly and easy a time of it as I possibly can. It isn’t as if I were a poor man’s son. If I were, I think I should presently marry a fortune to help matters out. By the way, I have an engagement to call on that pretty little Nora Read to-night. Good-bye, old fellow. Enjoy your climbing, if you can. I am pretty sure of enjoying life in my way, I fancy.”

Clayton turned one way, and Rob the other. The latter quickened his pace, musing as he went along :

“I can’t help feeling sorry for Clayt. I wonder if he never heard the old maxim, ‘He laughs best who laughs last’? I’m afraid he’ll have his laugh all over about the time it ought to begin.”

A few more steps, and Rob passed in at a neat iron gate. Level gravel walks between finely kept lawns and flowers and evergreens led up to the broad brown-stone steps before the beautiful house he called his home. He looked up at it now, with some of Clayton’s foolish words still ringing in his ear.

"My father was a poor man's son," he said to himself. "And he did not obtain this house and grounds by having an easy and jolly time of it. What an ungrateful fellow I should be, if I were to presume upon his hard-earned competence, as Clayt proposes to! I have heard it said that only poor men's sons succeed in life. And I fear Clayt is going to show the truth of this saying. But it is a burning shame for those whose fathers give them every advantage. Paul is right. Rich or poor, he wins who strives; and life was meant to be a time for work."

Rob passed in at the open door, and went straight to the library. He expected to find his father there at this hour, and was not disappointed.

He was seated in a great study-chair, with Concordance and Bible Dictionary and Bible on its arm-table. Rob knew that he was preparing the Bible Lesson which he taught every Sunday to his large class in the Sunday-school. Mr. Senderling always used for preparation the time when he was resting from business.

However deeply engrossed he might be in his

study, he was never yet known to be too busy to be interested in all that interested his only son.

"Well, my boy?" he asked, looking up pleasantly from his books as Rob entered.

"Shall I go to the store with you, sir, to-morrow morning?" asked Rob.

"To enter upon your duties there? Why Rob, I thought perhaps you would like to have a longer vacation. It is not quite two weeks yet since school closed," said his father.

"I know it, sir, but the work in the store will be so entirely new that the change in itself will be rest. I do not think I need a longer vacation, and I am anxious to get to work. I am ready to begin at once," replied Rob.

"That is well, my boy," said his father. "It is also well to carry the application of that thought to higher and nobler work than the concerns of this world. Now that you are just starting out in life, I have thought much about this matter, Rob. You have always been a good boy, my son, but that is not sufficient. It is only when we stand in the righteousness of Christ that we stand justified. While you are

striving for an honorable, and, I trust, useful earthly life, do not neglect those weightier matters of the life which lasts forever. Do you know that your father is praying for you every day of your life?"

"Yes, sir," replied Rob, without looking up, for the boy had always known that. His lip trembled, and his eye moistened as he spoke; and, somehow, he could not help thinking of the prayers that he instinctively felt had been breathed above his infant head by lips that were cold in death—for Rob's mother was no longer here to pray for her boy.

The tea-bell rang at that moment. Mr. Senderling rose, and passing his hand through the arm of his tall, manly son, they passed together through the hall, to the dining-room. As they went, the father continued :

"It is an excellent thing to be a good business-man, Rob—to be thorough and faithful in whatever line one marks out in life; and from the spirit which you have manifested to-day I believe that you will be just that. But the very highest attainments of human life are worth little—I should say nothing—if we neglect the weightier matter of the soul's salvation."

“ Neglect !” “ Neglect !” The word repeated itself, over and over again, in Rob’s ear. Why had his father used just that very word, of all others?—the one that Paul Elverton had used that afternoon?

CHAPTER VIII.

BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS.

THE almost level rays of the early morning sun lay in mild beauty over the earth, creeping in at Edith Hendry's half-closed blinds, and throwing long, slender shadows from the trees on the lawn. Edith loved to watch these shadows, and she cast many a glance from the window while she was making her usual morning toilet.

She then took up her Bible to read. In the morning she usually read a single verse—the one her eyes lit upon first. Her evening reading was longer and more systematic; but she chose these random verses for the morning, and often they proved comforts or warnings, or in some way helpful through the day.

This morning she was looking out at the long shadows while she opened her Bible. She had opened it in the Old Testament, and looking down on the page, she read:

“‘ And I will make thee a great nation, and I will

bless thee and make thy name great, and thou shalt be a blessing.'—And thou shalt be a blessing!"

What beautiful words they were! Edith knew perfectly well that they were spoken originally to Abraham; but was not God just as willing to make people blessings now as then? Did not the world need blessings just as much now? And would he make *her* a blessing if she asked him very earnestly?

She knelt down, and this was her prayer: "Lord, make me to be a blessing. Make me to carry the blessing of thy wonderful love wherever I go."

"What is it, mamma? Another of your headaches?" she asked, as she came into the breakfast-room.

"I am afraid it is, dear; and I am particularly sorry, for there are several things I wanted to do today," Mrs. Hendry replied.

"What is the use of a daughter, if she don't help you? Can't I do them, or, at least, some of them for you?" asked Edith.

"Perhaps you can, dear. Since your school duties no longer claim you, there are several things I would like you do with me."

"Oh, mamma ! To work with you will be delightful ! But to-day you must rest, and let me work for you, if there is anything with which you can trust me."

Breakfast was now brought in, and the rest of the family being summoned, this matter claimed their immediate attention. When the meal was over, Edith ascertained several of the things that had been upon her mother's programme for the day, and though somewhat inexperienced, she was able to attend to them with a fair degree of credit.

"And now, what else, mamma?" Edith asked, as she came to the lounge where her mother was resting, and passed her cool, soft hand over the throbbing brow for several moments.

"I did intend to take a small basket of comforts to Mrs. Blumm to-day ; but you will not care to go there, especially for the first time, alone," Mrs. Hendry replied.

"Why not, mamma ? Who is Mrs. Blumm ?"

"She is a woman whom I have met through our Friendly Aid. Her daughter came here one day with a physician's prescription. I never told you much

about the workings of that Society, because you have been so busy with your school duties. We sign the prescription of a regular practicing physician, and when thus signed, there are several druggists who will fill them, and then send the bill to the Aid. We make it a rule to sign these at once, even for entire strangers, as delay may be dangerous. But we always make special inquiry afterwards, before we extend further help.

"We found Mrs. Blumm poor, old, sick, and unhappy. She has a daughter who worked in a mill, and thus earned a scanty support for the two until, during the strikes, the mill that she worked in closed. She is now helped by the Aid, and I have been in the habit of sending her some things. However, I will not ask you to go; for a visit to her is never a pleasure."

Edith went on stroking her mother's brow for a few moments in silence. She was thinking of the verse she had read that morning, and the prayer she had breathed afterwards that God would make *her* a blessing. Presently she said, slowly:

"I suppose if one wishes to be a blessing in the

world, one must not think too much about one's self. Besides, why might I not as well do some of the unpleasant things as for you to do them all? Do you think Mrs. Blumm needs the things, or that I could do her any good by going?"

"I am quite certain she would be glad to have the things, though it is very probable she would not tell you so. I always read to her a while when I go. I must own that I never yet saw that she was benefited by it. Still we have to leave those things in the hands of the Lord."

To visit a poor, sick, ungrateful old woman was certainly not a pleasant prospect, and Edith indulged no poetic ideas about it. To consult her taste alone, she certainly would finish the book she was reading, or work a while on the cunning little Kate Greenaway figures she had been outlining on a new splasher for the spare-room, or practice her music lesson. Indeed, this last came to her mind as perhaps a duty, though she felt that no doubt there would be ample time for this after her return.

Then remembering her prayer, she felt ashamed that at the first unpleasant task she faltered.

It did not take so long for her to think of all these things as it has taken to write them down. Indeed, her mother scarcely noticed any hesitation at all before she said :

“I will take them, mamma. She may need them, and beside I may need the discipline of going.”

Mrs. Hendry drew the dear young face down close to her own.

“What a dear, helpful child you are, Edith! I thank God every day for having given you to me. Since the day you were born you have been one of my brightest and best blessings.”

Edith’s prayer was answered, or at least the knowledge of the answer came sooner than she expected.

Mrs. Hendry was right in anticipating that Mrs. Blumm would not express the least gratitude for anything. If Edith had been working for thanks, she would have felt her visit a sad failure.

The woman leaned upon her elbow in bed, and looked at each article as it was taken out of the basket with the eye of a critic rather than of a recipient of benefits.

“What kind of jelly is that?” she asked.

"Quince," replied Edith.

"I never did fancy quince jelly. I like currant a great deal better," said the invalid.

"This tumbler is currant, I think," said Edith, setting another, a smaller one, beside the quince jelly.

"Humph! the big one is quince, and the little one currant, and I like currant the best. That always was my luck," said Mrs. Blumm, with a sigh.

"This loaf of bread is very fresh and nice; it is almost warm from the oven," remarked Edith, mainly for something to say.

"Well, that is none the better for me. I eat nothing but toast of late, and fresh bread don't make toast as nice as stale. What is in that paper?"

"It feels like tea," said Edith, holding the small paper bag between her fingers, and keeping back at the same time some hasty words which she felt it would be a positive relief to utter.

"What kind of tea is it? I am very particular about what I drink. If it isn't mixed black and green, and mostly black, I can't even swallow it."

Edith opened the paper, and held it so that the light fell in upon its contents.

"Then you are suited, for that is exactly what it is," she replied.

"It is well that it is. Now I think of it, I remember that I told your ma that I couldn't drink any other."

Then there came some lemons and sugar, and a half dozen oranges, with which Mrs. Blumm could not possibly find fault. And the last thing to be taken out of the basket was a bowl, around which the other things had been carefully packed, and which contained some of the custard they had had for their own dessert that day.

"Well," said Mrs. Blumm, when she had inspected it, "I suppose that will do for Barb." (Her daughter's name was Barbara.) "You make things too sweet at your house to suit my taste. I never did like much sugar, and I don't believe it is healthy, either."

Edith was thoroughly glad there was nothing more in the basket to be found fault with.

But now, unfortunately, there was absolutely no more to be said. Mrs. Blumm had settled back on her pillow again, and looked as if nothing more could be of interest in this visit.

Presently it occurred to Edith that she might put the things away off the table, and she offered to do so. Mrs. Blumm refused this, however. Moreover, she refused it in a tone which sent the warm blood surging up into Edith's face ; for it seemed to imply that the young visitor wished to pry into affairs that did not concern her.

"It'll be time enough for that when Barb comes. They won't take any hurt standing there until then," said Mrs. Blumm.

Edith looked around the room for something to say or do next. On a stand between the two side windows lay a Bible. "Shall I read to you ?" asked Edith, reaching out her hand toward the volume.

"You may do as you please about it. Your ma always does, though I don't know as I care much about it," was the ungracious assent.

Still it was an assent, and Edith took the Bible, wondering what could touch this ungrateful woman's heart, and what she had best read.

The Book opened of its own accord to the Psalms. A bunch of flowers had been pressed just there ("some of Barb's foolishness," Mrs. Blumm remarked as she

saw it), and a red blossom had left its mark over the words :

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

Edith read it slowly, reverently, and then repeated the last sentence again :

“ And forget not all his benefits.”

It reminded her of the “ neglect not” that her mother had written in her Bible more than two years ago ; and in her heart she wondered if David had not strong reasons for putting down just exactly those words. How easy it is to forget the Lord’s benefits ! How often she had been guilty of that herself, taking them as a matter of course !

But her reflections were necessarily very short, for Mrs. Blumm’s querulous voice broke in with :

“ Benefits ! It’s precious few benefits I have to remember.”

“ May you not be one to whom the Lord is speaking because you have forgotten them ? ” suggested Edith.

“ I tell you I never had any to forget,” replied the sick woman, with a frown.

"Why, Mrs. Blumm, life itself is a benefit from God's hand : you cannot forget that?" said Edith, earnestly.

"Humph ! I call it a mighty poor sort of a benefit when a body has to lie in bed all her life," was the ungracious reply.

"Have you lain here all your life?" inquired Edith, ready to sympathize with the woes of so trying a case.

"Oh, no ; of course not!"

Mrs. Blumm did not seem inclined to follow the conversation further ; but Edith's next question was very direct, and needed an answer.

"How long have you been sick, Mrs. Blumm?"

"It's nigh on to two months now ; and I haven't been able to sit up an hour in all that time."

"Were you in poor health before two months ago?"

"Bless you, no ! That's what makes it so hard for me now. I never knew a sick day in all my life until two months ago."

"That certainly was a most remarkable benefit. There are few women of your age that could say the

same, I think. Did you remember to thank God for it while it was yours?"

"I don't know as I did ; but that is not now," replied Mrs. Blumm, not well pleased.

"Well, there is your daughter Barbara," suggested Edith, as she remembered her own mother's words of that morning.

"I guess you don't know Barb, do you ?" asked Mrs. Blumm, with an evasiveness that was not at all complimentary to that young lady.

"No, I don't know her ; but I should think she would be a great comfort to you. How could you manage without her ?"

"That's what I'll have to find out, I suppose, as soon as she marries Joe Horner; and that will be when the mill starts up again, I reckon. He has no work now. That is the way with girls. As soon as you need them to help you a bit, they are off. That is the sort of a benefit Barb is."

Edith groaned inwardly, and cast about in her mind for a benefit that would be recognized as such.

"Here is this snug little home of yours. I think you own it, don't you?"

"And mighty hard work I had to keep it too," assented Mrs. Blumm. "My old man never was any too beforehand. He was real smart, though, he was, when he was young. He knew a little bit of almost everything. But when it came down to work that would earn an honest living, why he wasn't there more than half the time. My father left me this house. My husband liked to be experimenting with all sorts of highfalutin' things instead of working steady ; and he was downright angry with me half a dozen times, he was, for not letting him mortgage the house to get money to carry on some of his nonsense. But, no. I wouldn't do it. I said my father worked hard, and earned the money, and left it to me, and I'm going to keep it ; and I did. Where would it have been now, I'd like to know, if he had had his way ?"

Edith made a last desperate effort :

"Then I suppose you look upon that as a benefit. I mean the fact that you insisted upon retaining the house."

Mrs. Blumm looked for a moment as if she felt herself fairly caught in her own acknowledgment ; but then she remarked :

"Well, if I do, I've nobody to thank for it but myself."

Edith gave up in despair. She read the rest of the Psalm without comment. If the reading did poor Mr. Blumm no good, it certainly did Edith.

"And forget not all his benefits."

How many of his benefits had she become so used to receiving that she had come to look upon them as a matter of course, and so had forgotten them as such!

She thought it over, and that night she brought the Bible to her mother with this request :

"Mamma, here is another command that I want you to write here on the fly-leaf underneath the 'neglect not.' It is 'forget not'—'forget not all his benefits.'"

"Do you feel that there is danger?" asked Mrs. Hendry, with a smile.

"I am afraid there is, mamma. You remember what you told me a long while ago about the sins of omission; and I believe there is nothing easier than to forget a benefit, unless it may be to remember an injury."

"But I did not ask you how you enjoyed your visit to Mrs. Blumm?" asked Mrs. Hendry, after she had complied with her daughter's request.

"I did not exactly enjoy it; but, at least, it did me good. That was what started me to remembering my benefits. She seems to have forgotten all about such things. Mamma, this morning I prayed that God would make me a blessing, and I thought, perhaps, I could do her some good. But I don't believe I did."

"We don't know about that. You must leave the result of your visit to God, my darling."

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND SON.

“WELL, Clayton, have you come to a decision yet?”

Mr. Carmon pushed back plate and cup, after his finished breakfast, just as his son, looking scarcely half awake, made his first appearance for the morning.

“No, sir, I believe I have not yet,” Clayton answered, as if it were a matter of very little importance.

Mr. Carmon frowned in deep displeasure.

“When do you think you will?” he asked.

“I couldn’t tell, indeed,” answered the boy, indifferently, as he received his coffee from the hand of a servant. Then seeing his father’s evident disapproval, he added, with affected thoughtfulness: “A matter which affects one’s whole lifetime is of sufficient importance to require time to think over.”

“And you have had time. It is nearly two months since school closed, and you seem no nearer a decision now than at first. In fact, I doubt if you have given

an honest thought to the matter.” The last was added with evident impatience.

“Indeed, you are mistaken there. One of the boys of our class is going to study medicine. I’ve no idea of following up his fantastical notions ; but it has led me to think of the eminent respectability of the life of a physician. And a wealthy physician, who has a handsome team and a good driver, seems to have a pretty easy time of it in life.”

“Your estimate of ‘an easy time’ differs somewhat from mine, if you consider that it can be met with in the life of a practicing physician. He is up and out at all hours, exposed to all weathers, and taking care of everybody’s rest and health except his own. However, that is not the question. Men were not put in the world to see how easy a life they can have. I had to work, and work hard, and I do believe every man owes to the world a life of usefulness and happiness. I am not a Christian, but I believe this upon common sense and humanitarian views. If you really desire to study medicine, I will see to your entering the college in the city—the fall term will begin soon.”

Most of this was entirely lost upon Clayton, who

remarked, carelessly, as he helped himself to a fresh roll :

"I don't think you need bother about it just yet. I have not fully decided upon it."

"Clayton, I really cannot allow this nonsense any longer. If you do not decide at once, I shall be forced to do so for you," remarked Mr. Carmon, with unusual emphasis.

"And what will your decision be?"

"That you must go into the store, as at first proposed."

"In what capacity?"

"Clerk."

"Why don't you ask me to be porter?"

"You may be that if you choose; but you must do something."

Clayton flushed angrily, and he looked up with an immense assumption of dignity.

"Sir, I consider that you have insulted me," he exclaimed, hotly.

"You are at liberty to consider whatever you please. Some people have a talent for inviting what they choose to call insults, and then getting angry

over it," replied Mr. Carmon, with perfect coolness —a coolness that was most exasperating to the unreasonable young man. "I only say, and shall maintain it, that you must do something. If you find the position of porter more congenial than that of clerk, I shall not interfere. However, I shall not allow my son to live in aimless idleness. I had to work hard for my living, and every man to be a man ought to do so."

"One would imagine that you were as poor as Job's turkey now, that I must enter such a menial position, and work like a dog for a living," replied Clayton, who, finding that he could make nothing by being dignified, dropped that tone, and now assumed the injured one.

"Whether I may be poor or otherwise, has nothing to do in the case. As for the position of clerk that I offer you, I have told you a score of times that as soon as you show yourself thoroughly competent, and an opportunity offers, you shall be raised. What more do you want?"

"But clerking is very confining work," complained Clayton.

"No more confining than any strong, healthy young man of your age ought to be willing to undertake. The men who make their mark in this world are the men who are not afraid of work, and hard work too."

"But I have never been brought up to work," Clayton objected again.

"I am sorry I have so far neglected your education. I will try to make amends for it in the future," was the rather unexpected, but certainly well-deserved answer, which this remark received.

The lad swallowed his coffee in sullen silence, and then rose from the table, his face showing his ill humor.

Just such a discussion as this had been begun several times since that day when he graduated ; but his mother had usually been present, and long before it had been pressed to its present uncomfortable length, she had entered her protest something after this manner :

"Now, James, dear" (she always called Mr. Carmon "James dear," when she especially wanted something done to suit her), "don't trouble the boy. I

know he is not feeling quite well to-day. Let him have a little longer rest before he thinks of what he is to do in the future. You know ‘boys will be boys,’ and you really can’t blame him for wanting to have a good time now that he is young. He is only nineteen, and many boys are still in school at that age.”

“And I am perfectly willing that he shall continue at school,” Mr. Carmon would reply. “I’ll send him to college if he wants to go, and will show enough interest to warrant me in so doing. I am perfectly willing he should do anything he chooses, provided he does something. It is his doing nothing that I object to.”

Clayton felt disappointed and angry this morning, that his mother was not present to intercede for him. In fact, this was Mr. Carmon’s principal reason for opening and pressing the subject at this time. His wife had finished her breakfast, and had excused herself to attend to the dressmaker, who had come early that morning; and the husband knew there was no likelihood of her speedy return to the dining-room.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Clayton,” said his

father, as the young man arose. "We'll say no more about this subject until the first day of September, a little more than a week from now. Then, if you have decided upon any course, I'll help you. If not, you must enter the store. My only motive is kindness to you. It would give me much less trouble at present to let you go to ruin as you please, and not worry about it," he added.

"Strange sort of kindness, it strikes me," muttered the young man, fiercely.

"Clayton, if I were to lose all I am worth to-day, what would you do to-morrow?"

"I don't know. You are not going to lose it; so there's no use talking of it."

"But if I should?"

"I don't know. Something—anything, I suppose. But as you are not going to lose it, I don't see any sense in the question."

"I hope I am not; but, of course, it is possible, and the question is always a wise one. The father who brings up sons without giving them the knowledge of some trade or business or profession is guilty of unpardonable neglect—one may almost say, of a

crime; for many a crime is directly due to this. Such men are an outrage on society, a blot on the earth; and I am not willing that my son should be one of them."

Mr. Carmon was roused, and spoke warmly.

"I think you are very harsh and unkind," whined Clayton.

"As I said before, you are at liberty to think exactly what you please," remarked Mr. Carmon, as he rose and prepared to leave for the store.

Clayton crossed the hall to the sitting-room, and then flung himself down on a wide, luxurious lounge, with his sullen face covered from sight. A little while later his mother, having been released from the dressmaker, found him there.

"Why, Clayton, my love, what is the matter? Has anything occurred to trouble you?" she asked, in deep solicitude.

"I should think there had!" he replied, his voice half smothered in the cushion. He was sure now of sympathy.

"What is it, dear? Tell me all about it," asked his mother.



His Choice.

Clayton suffered his head to be taken into her lap, but he still looked and spoke as if he were very much abused.

"Father says I must go into the store on the first of September, whether I want to or not," was the statement, or rather misstatement, that he made.

"I cannot think he really means it. I will talk to him. Don't worry about it now, dear; just leave it to me. Is there anything you would rather do than go in the store?" said this injudicious mother.

"I think I would rather study medicine," he remarked, after a little pause.

"Well, don't worry. I'll coax father to let you do that."

Of course, Mrs. Carmon had little difficulty in "coaxing" her husband to consent to this; for, as he had said, his only desire was that his son should make choice of some useful life calling, and then enter upon it.

Accordingly, Clayton Carmon went to the city that winter to study medicine.

Paul Elverton entered the medical college at the same time. The Lord had "opened the way" to

him sooner than he had anticipated, and, in truth, in a way that he neither knew nor understood.

Paul and Edith frequently met each other during the summer which followed their graduation from Hallberg Academy. Paul never forgot that kindly smile the girl had given him at a time when a great part of his little world seemed to have set itself against him.

They met often. As he came to know more of her character, his admiration deepened, and he found her society growing more and more delightful to him. They had many plans and aspirations alike. He told her of his hopes in regard to his life-work, and said that he would enter upon his study of medicine as soon as the Lord opened the way for him to do so.

By the death of the aunt after whom Edith had been named she had become the possessor of a small sum, the interest of which would be sufficient to cover the annual expenses at the medical college. Formerly this interest had always been reinvested; but now it was at her own disposal.

She had made the expenditure of this little income the subject of earnest prayer. All that she needed

was generously supplied by her father. And the question in Edith's mind was—How could she spend this money for the Lord?

The consequence of it all was that a draft enclosed in a note without signature was sent to Paul Elverton, with a statement that it would be sent yearly while he continued at his studies.

Paul accepted this as from the Lord. Never once in his thoughts did he connect Edith with the mysterious gift. He took it as an answer to prayer, and studied conscientiously.

CHAPTER X.

NEW YEAR'S EVE IN CHURCH.

IT was New Year's Eve, and it occurred this year on the evening of the Lord's Day.

Rob Senderling attended church regularly. He had been brought up to do so, and would scarcely have known what to do with himself and his time on Sunday were it not for church and Sunday-school.

Reba Ashwood attended church too, for the same reason ; and she met pleasant people there, so that it was pleasanter to go than to stay at home.

Nora Read attended occasionally—when it was neither too warm nor too cold ; when she had no love-story on hand that she wanted to finish, and when she had not completely tired herself out during the week. Very little exertion fatigued Nora Read too much to attend church ; but if it were a party, or a lecture, or a concert, that was proposed, she never once thought of being tired.

Clayton Carmon was another occasional attendant.

He was home now for the Christmas holidays, and the capital he made out of being a medical student, and his gratified vanity when some of his friends anticipated the conclusion of his course by two years and a half, and addressed him as "Doctor," was positively amusing to all but himself and his mother, and perhaps Nora Read, who looked upon Clayton with very partial eyes.

Nora went to church this New Year's Eve, because Clayton had called for her and taken her there. It would have made little difference to her whether the sermon was to be preached in English or Latin; for she did not go with the idea of being benefited by anything she heard.

Reba was there that night, with the solemn thoughts which the close of a year always brought to her. Never since Reba had been old enough to think much about it had the thirty-first day of December come without tearful regrets for the past, and large promises for the future—promises that she could not keep in her own strength; yet that was all in which Reba trusted.

To-day she had sorrowfully asked herself: "Who

was the better for her seventeen-and-a-half years of life?" And sadly had she responded: "No one."

She had looked over her carefully-wrought paintings and poems, and thought of her music; but, in it all, she knew that she had been desiring praise and favor for herself rather than the good of any living creature.

What wonder, then, that she had been forced to answer this searching question in the negative?

The thought of the entirely selfish aims of her life had not even occurred to her, though she wondered over and over again whether the result of the next twelve months would be as unsatisfactory as those that had just passed and gone.

Rob Senderling had come in early, and he sat watching his friends as they entered. His thoughts had not been unlike Reba's. He had looked back into the past and forward into the future; and he was far from wishing that all the future might be just as the past.

When Paul Elverton came in and took his seat, and bowed his head for a moment in silent prayer, Rob looked at him and recalled their conversation on that summer day not long after Commencement. He had

acted upon the advice then given, so far as the affairs of this life were concerned, and had profited thereby. But as for the other—well, he had not decided just yet ; that was all.

Edith Hendry was there, of course. As she glanced around and saw several of her former school-mates who were still out of Christ, she lifted her heart in prayer that they might soon be led to decide for him.

When the usual opening exercises were over, the minister, instead of giving out his text, stood for a moment in absolute silence ; and then, leaning across the open Bible, he related this fact :

“ In the northwestern part of Pennsylvania there is a court-house, upon whose summit I stood one day last summer. The janitor, who had kindly shown me over the building, stood beside me and pointed out the different objects of interest to be seen from that elevated point of view. While thus engaged, a passing cloud gave us a slight sun-shower.

“ Right along the ridge-pole of the roof of this building there was a flattened—in fact, slightly indented—space of perhaps six inches in width. As we

stood there, the rain drops came dancing down in the sunlight, its rays turning each into a diamond of brightness.

"Some fell on one side of the roof, and some on the other; but some fell in this little hollowed space that I have spoken of, forming little glistening eddies and pools, dimpling into a thousand rays of brightness, as each new drop was added to the number already there.

"But presently it became full, and over-brimmed its bounds. The man by my side called my attention to this fact, and asked :

"Do you know where these drops go ?"

"I did not, and he said :

"Those that fall upon this side are drained off to a little creek that runs along just in sight yonder. That, in time, runs into Lake Erie, and you know where its waters go, northward, through the Niagara River; and our little drop goes hurrying along, over the rapids, dashing over the Falls, and whirling around in the whirlpool, until it leaves this tumult for the broader, quieter Ontario. But it cannot stay there; it is swept onward over rapids again, as it travels the

length of the tumultuous St. Lawrence, then into St. Lawrence Gulf, until finally it is swept out into old ocean itself, to be mingled among the cold waters of the northern sea.

“‘The drop which falls on this side is drained into a tributary of the Alleghany River, which, you know, at Pittsburg unites with the Monongahela River to form the Ohio, along whose busy current it flows, until it reaches the “Father of Waters,” the muddy Mississippi. It has a long journey now, but presently it reaches the Gulf of Mexico; and then, in the Gulf Stream, it is borne out to the warm waters of the southern sea.’

“So these two drops, which played, and eddied, and dimpled here in the little space of six inches, under the same atmosphere, sparkling in the same sun-rays, are separated by the distance of a quarter of the circumference of the globe.

“My friends, I fear that some here to-night may be like those drops. You are here to-night breathing the same air, having the same privileges, hearing the same words; but it may be that consequences which eternity alone shall reveal will depend upon the way

you turn when you leave this little space. You may turn your faces heavenward—God grant you may—and spend all the ages of the endless beyond in the blissful presence and service of God. Or you may turn your hearts away from God's offer of salvation; and your course will be downward, downward, until you reach the depths of woe in everlasting punishment.

"But in another respect you are not like the drops that I saw. They obeyed only the inevitable law of gravitation, and upon whichever side they rolled, it was without their own volition.

"You are not thus bound by any law beyond your own will. What you do, you may do voluntarily and intelligently. Whichever way you turn, it is of your own will.

"There come moments in each one of our lives when we must make a definite choice in matters of this life. Moments when we must say 'yes,' or 'no,' and upon such little words as these a whole future career may depend. But to-night I bring to your hearts a matter of even weightier importance than any such; for its results reach onward through

eternity itself. To-night in my text, I bring you the words of the living God :

“ ‘I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Therefore, choose life that both thou and thy children may live.’

“ *Choose life.* It is before you ; but it can never be yours unless you voluntarily *choose it* for your own.

“ Does any one say, ‘ Certainly I will choose life—any one would choose life ; but *not now*. At present I will enjoy the world and its pleasures. I will choose life, but another time will answer for the avowal ’ ? Ah ! but who knows whether or not to-night this closing of the old year and threshold of the new one may be for you the turning-point of your history, to which you can no more return than those same identical drops, in all their tiny, elemental particles, could return again to their olden place on the top of that building.

“ You mistake if you think you can put this matter off, and decide at some other time just as you could now. Nothing in Nature stands still ; nor do we. You do not stand where you did last year, or where

you will a year from now. You do not see the change? But God does. In eternity you will.

“There is a significant verse in immediate connection with my text: ‘But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, *but shalt be drawn away* to worship other gods and serve them, ye shall surely perish.’

“Perhaps you think you are not deciding now, but your hearts will be drawn away. Perhaps you think you need not choose *this* day whom you will serve; but in reality you are choosing: you are deciding now. If it is not voluntarily and intelligently for Christ, for him now, you are deciding against him and for the world. And how shall we *escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

“Neglect? Neglect? Let me relate to you another incident:

“A building was on fire. The mother was carried out of danger by strong arms. But her baby—where was her baby? Above the din and bustle, above the roar of the flames and the hissing of the water, its frightened cry could be heard within those doomed walls. The anguished mother entreated some one to

save her baby. But they said it was mad folly ; that none could enter ; that there was no hope.

“ What mother could listen to such words ? She broke away from those who would have detained her, and rushed within those burning walls. They thought she had gone to inevitable death. But mother-love lent strength and speed and skill to the weak woman. She reached her child. She tore a blanket from the bed, in which she completely enveloped its little form ; and, with her precious burden strained close to her bosom, she fled through the flames.

“ She escaped with her life, and her baby was safe. But what a wreck was the apparently lifeless form which fell to the ground as soon as she had reached a place of safety ! Burned, disfigured, blind was the mother who had risked her life for her child.

“ Years passed. The baby grew to womanhood, the mother on to old age. The scars of the burns were too deep for time to remove their traces, and her eyes were still sightless.

“ Should you not have thought that every one of those scars, which might indeed appear as disfigurements to indifferent eyes, would have been to the

daughter, who at such a terrible sacrifice had been saved from death, marks of absolute beauty, because they revealed the depths of a pure and unselfish devotion to herself?

"But they were not. That daughter when, after her marriage to a wealthy man, she entered into gay and fashionable society, forgot the self sacrifice, forgot the love, and had no room in her life for her mother. She had no time to be eyes for the poor blind ones, which had become blind through love of her.

"When company called in the parlor, the mother sat alone in her room; and if they stayed to dinner, her solitary meal was sent up to be eaten there, where no one would see her, and her scars and her helplessness. And so the daughter's shame and neglect grew more and more apparent, until the mother's sad life grew to be a burden, and she would gladly have welcomed her release from earth.

"My friends, what kind of a heart do you think that girl must have possessed? I can almost hear your answer, as I read it in many faces: 'Ingrate!' 'Wicked!' 'Base!' 'The very heart of ingratitude and selfishness.'

"Yes, yes, all that is true. But what kind of a heart do *you* possess, that you are ashamed of Jesus? What kind of a heart do *you* possess, that you neglect him still? Did that mother do more for her child than he has done for you? You accuse her of ingratitude, when your conduct is no better. What kind of a heart must it be which still refuses Jesus? 'How can we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?'"

Much more followed, and at length the minister closed with a very affectionate and earnest appeal.

"What will you do with this Jesus which is called the Christ? He stands at the door of your hearts to-night, awaiting your decision. Will you choose Christ? or will you choose the world, which will prove a robber indeed—robbing you of the priceless gift of life eternal?"

Rob Senderling walked home with Reba Ashwood that night after church. They were deep in their own thoughts. Reba had never been so deeply aroused in all her life. She had always known, in a general way, that all were sinners, and, of course, she

could not consider herself as an exception; but that any personal responsibility rested upon her, or that neglect of the subject came from the sinfulness of her own heart, had never occurred to her. We know many things, in a general, abstract sort of a way, the personal application of which proves startling to our minds. Reba was beginning to think in this closer, personal way, as the two walked slowly homeward this winter's night.

Rob Senderling was thinking too. He recalled all that Paul Elverton had said that day a half year ago.

"What a fool I have been!" he thought to himself. "I took Paul's advice in regard to the less important matter, and found it to work well. Yet I have neglected it in higher things. What a wicked, ungrateful fellow I have been! I have sinned against light. I have always known how lost I was, and the way of salvation. Father has been praying for me too! And mother——"

Rob felt a great lump rising in his throat, and he was glad it was dark where they were walking just at that moment. The memory of Rob's mother was very sacred to him.

CHAPTER XI.

REBA'S SELF-IMPOSED BURDENS.

"**R**OB," said Reba, when they stood for a moment at her door, "I feel as if I had reached the point when I must choose, and my choice must be for life."

Rob cleared his throat before he answered:

"I feel a good deal the same, Reba. I've been thinking of this matter for the past six months. Paul Elverton and I had a long talk one day about choosing, and the result of neglecting to choose. Paul is a sensible fellow; I followed his advice part way, and I mean now to follow it fully, if God will help me."

"I never thought about *my* being a sinner before; in fact, I have considered myself a pretty good sort of a person, and I have despised ingratitude above all sins. But to-night I saw myself differently. Do you think Christ can forgive so *long* neglect?" asked Reba, very seriously.

"I've been thinking of this also. But yours was only thoughtlessness, while mine was willful neglect. But, Reba, my father has been praying for me. He would not have done that if there had been no hope. I believe Christ will save us yet. Good-night, Reba."

So they parted, each to think it over, and pray about it alone. And in his own good way the Lord led them both to himself.

Walking homeward that evening, Nora shrugged her pretty shoulders, and looked up at Clayton, and asked if he didn't "think that girl the minister told about was just horrid."

And he looked down at her, and replied:

"Yes, and I don't like horrid girls at all; I only like sweet, pretty ones," while a little pressure of the small gloved hand which lay on his arm, told her what sweet, pretty girl he was thinking about then, and liked best of all.

He then looked up in the sky, and pointed out two or three stars and constellations, whose names he had studied up for this especial occasion, and he was gratified with her admiration for his vast knowledge.

So the walk homeward to them, if not profitable, was exceedingly pleasant according to their ways of thinking.

Paul Elverton and Edith Hendry were coming home from church together just behind them. They, too, had discussed the sermon from their own stand-point, and Edith had said :

“Do you know, Paul, I’ve been thinking a good deal lately about the power of personal prayer. Praying, I mean, for some individual, instead of generalizing, as we are too prone to do. For more than two months now I have been praying for Reba Ashwood. I have tried to engage her in serious conversation several times, but it always seemed to be a subject to which she has given no thought. I watched her to-night, however, and I think she was deeply moved.”

“I do not see how any one who had not already decided for Christ could help deciding to-night,” answered Paul. “I have been praying especially during the last six months for Rob Senderling, and from his expression to-night I have a hope that God is going to use this sermon to answer my prayers. But, whether your prayer or mine is to be answered at

once or not, let us not grow weary. It will be answered, I am sure, in God's best time."

Edith was not surprised to learn, when next she met her friend Reba Ashwood, that her "face was turned heavenward."

Reba never did anything by halves. She entered into this new life with all the zeal which was characteristic of her nature. She spoke freely of her own sinfulness, and of her entire reliance upon Christ as her Saviour.

But Edith was very much surprised at what she said next :

"I've given up all my old employments now. I wrote this morning to dismiss my music-teacher, and when you came in, I was collecting all my manuscripts to be burned."

"But, really, Reba, you will not give up your music?" Edith asked.

"I certainly shall!" replied Reba, with much decision.

"Think of the money and time that have been spent on your musical education, Reba. If you give it up entirely, that will all be wasted. Of course,

your aim now will be different from what it was before ; but you must not think of giving up music, your especial talent.”

“ Wasted—that is what it has been ; but now that my eyes are opened, I cannot think of adding any more to that account. I shall give it up entirely, and writing too.”

“ But *why*, Reba ? I cannot see what has led you to this resolve.”

“ I cannot think of wasting any more time and money in that way. Life holds more important duties now,” Reba answered, somewhat loftily.

Edith did not answer immediately. She was a Christian, but she took music lessons and practiced daily. Her father and mother were Christians, exceedingly practical ones too ; and it was by their advice, and in accordance with their wishes, that she did so. Was it possible that they and she had never given the subject sufficiently careful consideration ?

But she remembered many times when her father or mother, wearied with the day’s business conflicts and trials, had asked her to sing or play a certain piece, and the genuine pleasure with which they thanked her ; she

remembered a hymn that she had sung to old Mrs. Blumm one day, how she had turned away her head, and afterward said, in a tremulous tone : " My mother used to sing that when I was a little girl." And once, when the minister had called and asked her to play, she had chosen a sweet, soft reverie. When she rose from the piano, he had said :

" I often rejoice to think how much music there will be in heaven—don't you ? "

She had thought of these words frequently, as she sat at the piano, and had played with a glad joy in her heart.

No, no ; music could not be a pleasure forbidden because she was a Christian. Being a Christian seemed to give her an added right to enjoy it, since only such would know its harmony forever.

Reba watched the sober face for several moments. Though she could not know these thoughts, she read there that her reply had not been satisfactory.

" Well ? " she said, presently. " You don't think I am right ? "

" No, I don't."

" What then ? "

"If, as you say, all your thoughts in studying music have been vain and selfish, you ought to leave those out now, but use your music in a better way," she said, thoughtfully.

"One of the things I never can be, Edith Hendry, is a half-way Christian; that is not my nature. If I am going to serve the Lord, I must do it wholly, or not at all; and, therefore, I must give up my music and writing, and all my old vain aspirations," she said again, with more energy than the case seemed to require, unless, indeed, energy was to take the place of sound reasoning. Edith's voice and manner were still very quiet and thoughtful.

"But, honestly," said Edith, "there is a difference between giving up a talent that God has given you, and giving up the vain aspirations you may hitherto have indulged in regard to it. You *must not* give up your music, or your writing, either. You must use them for him. What do your father and mother say about this idea?"

"Oh, they were almost angry when I first announced my intention. They said it was ungrateful to them, and used all sorts of arguments to try and

dissuade me from my purpose. But ‘I must obey God rather than man,’ ” added Reba, firmly, with somewhat the air of a would-be martyr.

“ If you can bring me any command of God which even remotely suggests any such duty, I’ll give up,” said Edith. “ But I really think you are very much mistaken. Do you propose to give up music in heaven, too ? ”

“ *That* is very different ! Do not try to dissuade me, Edith ; for my mind is fully made up, and my determination is founded upon what I believe to be duty.”

And Reba stood by this determination.

Not long after this Reba “ made up her mind ” to something else.

She was reading in her Bible about David’s purchase of the threshing floor from Araunah, and how he had said, “ I will surely buy it of thee at a price, neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing,” when suddenly a thought came to her with startling and unpleasant force. It was that she had never yet given to Christ or his cause anything that had been a real cost to herself.

It seemed to her at the time that there was nothing in the realm of Christian duty to give, except money. Didn't David pay for the threshing floor with shekels of gold?

Her father supplied her unstintingly with whatever she asked ; what she had given had been his money rather than her own. She felt shocked at this, and at once resolved to give that which would cost her individually something.

But how ?

It had never before entered Reba Ashwood's head to try to earn money ; and now that she decided that it was a Christian duty to earn something, she did not know where to begin to look for the means.

We do not say that it was a Christian duty on her part. The Lord does not call upon all to work in the same way. It might be another person's duty without being hers ; and if she had looked aright, she might have readily found other ways of giving that cost her something.

Reba thought of turning her music, or her pen to account, but she resolutely repelled such an idea as a temptation. She told herself that she had given them

both up for the Lord. She would not be like that unworthy servant who, having put his hand to the plough, had looked back.

Besides, she felt that she "needed a harsher discipline to bring down her pride, and teach her a lesson that she would not forget in the future."

The matter troubled her greatly, until she heard of a poor woman who was supporting herself and family by making vests at twelve cents apiece, for a large clothing house in the city. That she considered sufficiently hard, and sufficiently distasteful work to satisfy her conscience. So she forthwith took some instructions from this woman, obtained a dozen vests, and set herself about the unaccustomed task of making them.

All the zeal that had ever been put into music and writing and painting, now centred upon vest making ; and she was on her fourth dozen, when Edith came in one day and found her thus engaged.

"Why, Reba Ashwood, what are you doing ?" she asked, in surprise.

"Don't you see what I am doing ? I am making vests."

"Yes, I see that ; but what for ?"

"To earn money, to be sure—what else ? There is no especial fun in it, I assure you."

Edith looked puzzled. She had not heard of any change in the financial affairs of Mr. Ashwood ; but what else could make Reba stitch away upon underpaid vests until she was pale and tired ? She was holding her side, which ached sadly from the steady sewing, to which she was altogether unused.

Reba guessed her friend's thought, and answered it.

"Oh, no ! Father has not failed. I am earning money from choice. In fact, I almost had to quarrel with him and mother before they would consent at all. But I feel it to be a duty to earn the money I give to the Lord's cause. David would not give that which cost him nothing—and I won't, either."

The puzzled look changed to one of disapprobation.

"Your ideas of duty differ somewhat from mine. I can imagine no circumstances under which it is a girl's duty to 'almost quarrel' with her parents," said Edith.

"But, as they are not Christians, of course they could not be expected to look upon matters of duty as I do," replied Reba, as she started the sewing-machine,

which hummed so noisily that her friend had no opportunity to reply until the end of the seam was reached. Even then she had to speak quickly, lest her voice be lost again in the next seam.

"I don't see how you can ever hope to win them by the course you are at present pursuing," said Edith.

Two or three more seams were stitched, and then Reba being now ready to baste and prepare some portion of the work, turned round to her friend.

"It would be a poor way to try to win them by violating my own conscience," she remarked, as she placed her hand on her aching side again, and drew a long, tired breath.

"Reba Ashwood, you are really sick now; leave this work and come and take a walk with me."

Edith attempted to draw the work from her hands, and for a second the weary girl almost let it go; but then she reached out after it again, as she replied, firmly:

"No, I promised the Lord that I would give of my own earnings, at the mission circle on Thursday night, one dollar and forty-four cents, for the cause of missions in the far West, and I must do it. Really, I

don't see why everybody joins together to make my Christian life, and the performance of what I feel to be my duty, so hard. It isn't kind in you, Edith—indeed, it is not. I have a right to expect help and encouragement from you, as I cannot look for it from my family, none of whom profess to be Christians."

The over-tired body and over-wrought nerves were almost giving way. There was a plaintive note in the weary voice, and a teardrop glistened in the eyes that never used to be circled, as they were to-day, by dark, shadowy lines. The lips, too, trembled piteously, in a manner very unlike their usual firm expression.

Edith rose and knelt before her friend on a low footstool, wound both arms around her, and drew the tired head down to a resting-place upon her own shoulder.

"Indeed, Reba, I do not want to make your Christian duty harder; it is only that I cannot see this to be duty. You have taken up burdens that God never meant for you, and you will make yourself sick, Reba. Indeed, you are almost so already, and we have no right to injure our bodies. If you really want to earn money for the Lord, why not do it by using the special

talent the Lord has given you, and giving music lessons?"

Edith was right. Reba was sick already, otherwise she would hardly have given way to the tears which she had kept back so long. Upon her friend's shoulder she had a hearty cry; but she choked back the tears as well as she could, as if it were wrong for her to listen to the last suggestion.

"Don't, Edith; don't tempt me in that way. I have given that up, I tell you. I shall never play any more. Please, please do not suggest such a thing."

She raised her head and held her temples with both hands.

"You can't work any more at present, at any rate. You must rest your head and eyes and side. Come, I am going to take you for a walk, whether you want to go or not."

Edith spoke with playful authority, and Reba no longer resisted. She bathed her face and eyes while Edith brought out her hat and wrap.

CHAPTER XII.

A VISIT TO MRS. BLUMM.

IT was a clear, bright afternoon in March. The air held a suggestion of coming spring, and the sunshine was pleasant to feel and to look upon. It was such a day as we look for occasionally in April, but which sometimes comes to gladden our hearts a month in advance.

Reba enjoyed the day even more than Edith; for she had been used to so free a life, that she had been pining for the fresh air more than she herself realized.

At first there was not much said by either. They only walked arm in arm and enjoyed the scene and the clear, bright day. When they had gone some distance, Edith said :

“ I want to go to see old Mrs. Blumm. It is not a very pleasant place to call, I know. Would you mind going with me, Reba ? ”

Edith’s reason for proposing this visit was to take Reba’s thoughts away from herself and her own

doings ; and, as that young lady had no special aim in her walk, she did not offer the least objection, though she had no idea who Mrs. Blumm was.

Mrs. Blumm was better in health. Probably she would never be strong again, but she was sitting up, doing some coarse sewing.

Reba wondered much why Edith could be so interested in the making of children's gingham aprons. She knew nothing about the workings of the Friendly Aid Society, though she remembered that her mother contributed yearly to a society bearing a name something like that. Mrs. Blumm was paid for making these aprons, partly that they might be used in their work of charity, but mainly in order to provide the woman with work, for which the Aid could pay her. It was a rule to help people to help themselves, if it was possible, rather than to aid them in idleness.

After Edith had made some inquiries, and given some directions about the work, she read a chapter from the Bible; and then, although she knew her voice had neither the cultivation, nor the strength and beauty of Reba's, she sang a sweet hymn in her own simple, unaffected manner.



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His Choice.

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Mrs. Blumm was not so ungrateful as upon a former occasion. She thanked Edith for the reading, and again for the hymn; she even found it possible to smile over some of the girl's bright remarks. And when they left, her invitation to call again was really very earnest.

Still, even with this improvement, Edith had said truly it was not a pleasant place to visit; and when they were fairly on the street again, Reba asked :

"Why do you go there, Edith? Certainly, she is nothing to you?"

"Why do you send money to the heathen? Certainly, they are nothing to you?" asked Edith, instead of an answer.

"Oh, but that is different!"

"Yes, and no," replied Edith. "Mrs. Blumm is nothing to me in the personal sense in which you meant. But she is one of God's creatures; so she *ought* to be something to me."

"You certainly can't find any pleasure in going there," remarked Reba.

"Yes I do—the pleasure of duty performed for

God. Do you find any special pleasure in the making of those vests ? ” asked Edith.

“ That is different,” replied Reba, as she compressed her lips firmly and looked straight before her into the beautiful sunshine. “ It is *right* for me to give what costs me something ; and I must do right, whether it is a pleasure or not.”

“ And it is right for me to give what costs me something too. *In itself* it is not a pleasure for me to go to see Mrs. Blumm ; she is not congenial, and her surroundings are not altogether pleasant. To go there I must give time and patience, and nearly always forego other pleasures. Still, I gladly give them ; and, as I said before, I have the joy of duty performed for my Saviour.”

Time and patience and self-denial ! Why, these were things that Reba Ashwood had never once thought of giving to the Lord. She had thought of nothing that could be given but money.

She had, it is true, been giving time and strength and patience (and a good deal of impatience too) ; but, after all, she had not been giving them *to the Lord*. She had not thought of the Lord at all in *that* part of

her giving ; and really she had been giving it to her own perversity.

She was not convinced by her friend's words that money was not in reality *the* thing to be given. She said something to that effect presently.

"I will tell you how I look at it," Edith replied. "I think the Lord requires us to give of what we have, and not of what we have not. He has given me the stewardship of but a limited amount of money, and I try to use it for him." Edith referred to the allowance given her monthly by her father. "But he has given me other things—my life, to make the best use of for him that I can ; that includes time, patience, strength, love, helpfulness, money—all that I have. I should not feel that it was right to cross the will of my parents, and work myself sick to get more of something that God has not seen fit to give me the control of ; so doing, I might neglect these other things he has given me.

"Paul once wrote to Timothy—the verse is written on the fly-leaf of my Bible, and I am glad it is, so I can never forget it—' Neglect not the gift that is in thee.' He does not say, ' Neglect not the gift that is

in thy brother,' or 'the gift that I have given to thy neighbor,' but '*in thee.*' Timothy's own personal responsibility was with his own personal gift. So far as money is concerned, I know that father conscientiously devotes to the cause of Christ a tithe of his income; and as my smaller amount has less demands upon it, I can give a larger proportion. While I rejoice to do this, I do not feel that money is peculiarly the gift with which I am entrusted. I am grateful to papa that his energy and business ability have placed me in a position where I can have so much of my time for others."

"We look at things somewhat differently," was the only answer Reba made, as she sighed rather wearily.

They had reached the principal business street again, and were now leisurely walking among its hurried, bustling throng.

"I want to get some Saxony wool for mamma, at Carmon & Senderling's," said Edith, as they drew nearer the handsomest store in the street.

Rob Senderling happened not to be in the store, and Edith remarked :

"I wonder where Rob is to-day? I understand he is doing himself credit here."

Reba could not help flushing with pleasure at the praise of her friend, but she simply glanced over at the place where he was not, and said she did not know why he was absent.

They bought the wool, and turned to leave the store, when Rob himself met them.

"Give an account of yourself, sir," demanded Edith, with playful authority. "Why are you not at your post of duty?" And she pointed back toward his counter.

"At your service, ma'am," replied Rob, with a profound bow. "If you please, that is exactly where I am."

"Why, how is that?" asked both girls, in surprise.

"Perhaps you have not heard that the firm met with a loss a few weeks ago, in the death abroad of one of their most trusted buyers. His place had to be filled, and this necessitates a number of changes. Among other things, the head of our department was advanced along the line, and I have been given his position."

"I thought perhaps you were going to say they would send you to London and Paris and Germany, to buy for the firm?" said Reba, half teasingly.

"Not yet. I have two or three things to learn before I could do that—and you didn't think so, either," Rob replied, looking down in the face that the walk had wonderfully brightened.

Edith looked up into the frank, determined face, as she remarked :

"But you are very young to be at the head of a department in a store like this?"

"I know it," replied Rob. "And father and Mr. Carmon hesitated to give me the position on that very account. But——"

Rob suddenly stopped. Perhaps he thought what he was about to say would sound egotistical ; or perhaps it was really the remembrance of an errand that made him leave his sentence unfinished, and look hurriedly at his watch.

"I have an errand to do for father at the bank before it closes. If you have finished your purchases, and will allow me, I will walk down the street with you," he said.

On their way down, he resumed, if not the former sentence, at least the former thought.

"I'll tell you what it is, girls, I am perfectly astonished at the way many clerks work. They try to get along the easiest way they can, and seem to imagine that if they know the color and price of a piece of goods, that is all. They put no heart in what they are doing, and do not fit themselves for anything else, and then are grieved when higher positions are given to their neighbor.

"I am not at all sure," confessed the young business man, "but I should have done the same, if it had not been for a long talk I had one day with Paul Elverton. I shall never forget his pointing out a poor, old, forlorn looking ragpicker, and saying, if we should ask him, we should certainly find that he was in his present pitiable condition, not because he had chosen it, but because he had not absolutely chosen anything higher. I made up my mind then, that whatever position I occupied, I would fit myself for the one above it. With God's help, I have conscientiously kept that resolution. It meant work—and I have worked hard. But I am repaid to-day. Any other

clerk in that department might have been at its head to-day, if he had chosen to fit himself."

"I am glad for you, Rob," said Edith, holding out her hand in congratulation, and her face and voice and manner re-echoed her words.

"You remind me of what somebody has said, though I confess I have forgotten his name : 'Tis not in mortals to command success ; but we'll do more—deserve it,'" said Reba.

"I mean to do my best to deserve it," replied Rob, as he looked straight into Reba's eyes. "Then, if the Lord does not send it to me, it will be because I cannot serve him best so."

They had reached the bank, and Rob lifted his hat and lightly ran up the stone steps before the fine old building.

The girls watched him until he had disappeared within the doors, one with a frank, proud look upon her face—for Edith Hendry was proud to number Rob Senderling among her friends—and the other with a tender light, that was very pleasant to see in those clear eyes.



SNYDER

His Choice.

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CHAPTER XIII.

REBA OBTAINS CLEARER VIEWS OF THE TRUTH.

REBA ASHWOOD finished the last dozen vests, and gave the one dollar and forty-four cents of hard-earned money to the mission circle on Thursday night; but somehow the joy that she had expected to find in this giving what had cost her so much sacrifice was missing.

Her parent's opposition, instead of lessening, had increased as the days wore on, and she knew she had disregarded their wishes. Not only this, but memory recalled more than one impatient, willful, unchristian word that she had spoken, and much of thoughtless neglect of the wants and feelings of others which she had shown while she had been thus employed. And the question came, Had her motive been altogether pure? Was she really as anxious to make a sacrifice *for God* as to let those around her know and realize her zeal?

She meant to kill vanity and selfish aspirations

with one fell blow when she gave up music and painting and writing. She had thought of these as the only forms her besetting sin could assume, and had not yet learned how deceitful the human heart can be.

She was only beginning to question herself, as she sat by the side of Edith Hendry in the missionary meeting.

Edith seemed very happy. She had not given as much money into the treasury as had her neighbor, but all through the fortnight since the last meeting, she, like the widow whom the Saviour commended, had been giving "of her living" into that larger treasury of her Lord, in whose sight money is but a single item.

Edith, it is true, never had the temptation to vanity that had beset her friend. The gifts that had been entrusted to her were neither rare nor brilliant. She felt that she had nothing in the world to be proud of.

Reba did not feel proud to-night. She felt, on the contrary, very miserable; for conscience would not be quiet. And when Reba was not on the

mountain top, she would most likely be away down in the valley ; she seldom rested between.

She was glad when the meeting was over. She had frequently heard it said that, when one works for an object, one's interest in it increases wonderfully. She had told herself that she had been working for the poor, benighted heathen, and she had expected to take the deepest possible interest in all the details of this meeting. But in this she was disappointed ; and this was only natural, for she had not in reality been working for the heathen ; she had been working for herself.

But, glad as she was when the meeting was dismissed, she was not glad when she entered the hall of her own home to hear the sound of gay voices issuing from the parlor.

She wished to escape immediately to her room ; but the drapery of the door leading toward the hall was drawn aside, and her brother sat just where he could see her, and he spoke to her ; so she was obliged to enter that merry circle of friends.

Two of them were distant relations, and particu-

larly fine singers. Her arrival was hailed with delight, and music was immediately called for.

Reba looked annoyed beyond measure.

Her refusal to play was received with astonishment. Reba Ashwood had always been so ready, and so pleased to gratify her friends in this way, that it was entirely unlooked for.

"I have given up music entirely," she said, with a weary little sigh.

"And taken up vestmaking instead," added her brother, provokingly.

Reba flushed. It did not seem so praiseworthy to-day as it had yesterday.

"You surely are joking!" exclaimed one.

"What can you mean?" inquired another.

But Reba was confused, and before she had time to make the least explanation, her brother volunteered one for her.

"Oh, you didn't know that our Reba has become religious of late?" he said. "Well, she has, and you remember when she gets a disease she always frightens the whole family half to death over it; but she always pulls through somehow or another, and

we still have some hope that when this fever has its run, she'll get over this too."

Poor Reba's face flushed painfully. She had no opportunity to speak, though, for Charlie's presentation of the matter was greeted with much merriment; albeit they were ready enough to take up her defence.

"That is positively too bad in you, Charlie Ashwood!" remarked one.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to speak in such a manner!" said another.

"Come, Reba, to prove him false, come and play for us," urged a third.

Reba shook her head.

"I cannot play now," she repeated with difficulty.

"Reba, it strikes me you have carried this foolishness about far enough. I have spent hundreds of dollars, and you have spent days of time upon your musical education; and I do not choose that you shall throw it away thus," said her father, more sternly than she had ever known him to speak in his life.

There were tears in Reba's eyes now. She was very tired and nervous. Her recent dissatisfaction

with herself, her brother's taunt, her friend's surprise, and her father's stern displeasure, all combined to distress her.

But close to Reba sat a sweet young Christian girl, the only Christian except Reba in this evening's company. She looked up into her flushed, troubled face, and asked, softly :

"Did you ever think, Reba, how it must have sounded when Jesus stood up among his disciples in that upper room, before they went out into the garden of betrayal, and those twelve sang a hymn? I imagine Jesus' voice must have been clear and sweet, and thrilling above all the rest—don't you?"

Reba did not answer in words, but she was not wholly vain and selfish. She *did* love the Lord Jesus, and she *did* want to serve him. And the sound of his name, spoken low by this dear young girl, touched and thrilled a cord in her heart, which that name alone could have caused thus to vibrate.

She pressed the hand that had sought hers in silence, then she crossed the room, and took her place at the piano.

Reba did not play as well as usual. Her mind was

much preoccupied. Still no one seemed to notice this. One after another called for their favorite selections, and Reba played on.

"Now, Reba, sing something alone," was presently the request.

"Oh, I can't, you must not ask me. You know I am all out of practice," Reba urged, turning half around on the stool, as if she would rise.

"We will remember that fact, and take it into consideration in our criticism," said her father, in a determined tone, which plainly spoke his desire for her to comply with the request.

Yesterday she would have paid no heed to this, but now she turned back to the instrument again. She half reached out her hand toward a volume of bound music, containing many choice and difficult selections. But just then the words that had so affected her a moment before, came to her mind.

She dropped her hands in her lap, hopelessly, and her heart almost failed her. She could not sing any of those opera airs or sentimental ballads to-night, and she told herself that she knew nothing else.

"Come, Miss Reba, what are you going to sing ?

Do you want any of these books?" asked a gentleman who stood near the music rack.

"No; none of those," she answered, looking hopelessly along their number. Then, with a strong effort, she controlled herself, and struck the chords of the piano firmly. Her selection, perhaps, would not meet with the approval of her gay audience; but at that moment she could not sing any of her old songs.

She cleared her throat, and then, looking resolutely neither to the right nor to the left, she sang one of the simple hymns that she had heard so often at prayer meeting, and had sung it over to herself, until it had become perfectly familiar to her:

"In thy cleft, O Rock of Ages,
 Hide thou me;
When the fitful tempest rages,
 Hide thou me:
Where no mortal arm can sever
From my heart thy love forever,
 Hide me, O thou Rock of Ages,
 Safe in thee.

From the snare of sinful pleasure
 Hide thou me;
Thou my soul's eternal treasure,
 Hide thou me:

When the world its power is wielding,
And my heart is almost yielding,
Hide me, O thou Rock of Ages,
Safe in thee.

In the lonely night of sorrow,
 Hide thou me;
'Till in glory dawns the morrow,
 Hide thou me:
In the sight of Jordan's billow
Let thy bosom be my pillow.
Hide me, O thou Rock of Ages,
 Safe in thee.

Her voice seemed to have lost none of its rich, full sweetness, and, unconsciously, she sang with a power she had never had before, for her heart was in the words. And, as she went on, she seemed to sing strength and love and comfort into her own soul.

Where, in this moment of trial, could she have found refuge except in Jesus? She realized all the beauty and power of those words as she never had dreamed of before.

She felt stronger and calmer when she had finished, and a sweet, restful sense of the conscious approval of her Lord, to which she had been a stranger for

many a day, possessed her soul. Perhaps this was the first act since the day of her baptism which she had performed without a single thought of self in it, and with the pure and unmixed motive of pleasing Jesus, her Lord.

She had told herself that she would be pleasing him by giving up her music; did he want her to use it for him instead? She had told herself that she would be pleasing him by "going out of her way and taking up burdens he had not given her"; but did he want, instead, the simple service of her time?

Reba had now the beginnings of a good many lessons. She would have to study them out in future days.

CHAPTER XIV.

DEATH IN TWO HOMES.

NEARLY a year had taken its rapid flight. A year during which Reba had been learning the lessons, the beginning of which we have hinted at; a year in which Edith had been striving not to neglect her gift, and not to forget her benefits; and a year in which Nora had been pursuing her one object of pleasure.

It was a year during which Rob Senderling was learning all he could in his present position, and fitting himself to be ready again to step upward whenever a call might come; and meanwhile he was winning golden opinions from all sorts of people.

During this year, Paul Elverton was doing faithful work at the medical college, preparing for what he felt to be his great life work, and conscientiously using every faculty to the best possible advantage.

Clayton Carmon, during this year, was having a "good, easy time," sometimes attending lectures and

sometimes not, answering Nora's long letters with others just as long, and telling Paul Elverton, when they occasionally met, that "all work and no play would make Jack a dull boy."

At the end of that year the death angel came upon the self-same night into two of the homes with which we have become acquainted.

One whom he claimed was Mr. Carmon, the senior member of the firm of Carmon & Senderling. In his beautiful, luxurious chamber, this man of the world lay dying.

He had been ill for several weeks, but not until this very day had he any other idea than that he should soon recover his former health.

This man, whose arguments were perfectly sound upon a business basis ; who foresaw ruin in procrastination and absolute failure in indecision, never thought of applying the same argument to an infinitely higher sphere. So now he had come to within a few hours of his entrance into the life beyond, and he had constantly put off all preparation for that solemn hour.

His wife could not say one word to comfort him. She knew nothing of the only source of comfort herself.

Clayton had been summoned home from the city, but it was useless to look to him for comfort, or anything else.

Mr. Senderling had called upon his partner a number of times during his illness. He was not the man to wait until his friend was upon a dying-bed before he spoke to him of his soul's needs. He had often and earnestly spoken of this during the years of their business partnership; but Mr. Carmon had always referred the matter to the future. And when, during his visits to his sick chamber, he had endeavored to urge the subject, Mr. Carmon spoke of the prospect of recovery, and saw no occasion for haste in the matter.

He sent for his friend now when he learned the dreadful truth. What would he not have given then to have gone back over the years of his life! But it was too late for that now. Too late.

Mr. Senderling came at once. He talked and prayed with the dying man; but his body was weakened by disease, and his mind almost paralyzed by the near approach of a change for which he was so little prepared. There could be but little satisfaction now.

The other home, to which the messenger of death came that night, was a very humble one—a striking contrast to Mr. Carmon's. And the scene enacted there was a contrast too.

On her poor bed lay old Mrs. Blumm. On one side sat Barbara and her husband (for she had married, as her mother foresaw), and on the other was Edith Hendry.

Many a night, of late, Edith had watched by that sick bed ; many a word of comfort had she whispered to the traveler who was going down into the dark valley of death. Many a word of sympathy had she spoken to those who would remain after she had gone. Edith's influence in this home since the day of her first visit can never be calculated or known upon earth. There will be very many revealings in the future, of which we little dream now.

Through her influence the woman who had grown old in ingratitude and complainings had come to recognize the many benefits which the Lord bestowed on her, and both she and Barbara had finally been led to Christ. And now the mother shrank not as she came near to the cold wave of Jordan, and the daugh-

ter looked forward into future days with nobler and higher purposes.

Near midnight there was a slight movement from the bed, and the watchers rose and gathered nearer, conscious that the end could not be far away. The old, wrinkled hands moved feebly, as if feeling after something in the dark. Edith took one in her own soft, warm grasp.

"Is Jesus still near you?" she asked.

"Yes, child, yes. Oh! who could face death without him?"

"Do you fear nothing?"

"Nothing. 'The Lord is my shepherd'—say that again, Miss Edith. I want to hear it again."

"'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,'" repeated Edith, with slow and reverent accent.

"Yes, yes," said the dying woman. "'In the val-

ley of the shadow of death,' 'they comfort me,' 'fear no evil,' 'thou art with me,' 'they comfort me,'" she whispered the broken sentences slowly.

There was silence for several minutes, except for the sobs of Barbara. Presently Mrs. Blumm tightened her grasp on the small hand that still held hers.

"Miss Edith," she said, and then paused.

"I am here, Mrs. Blumm, close beside you."

"Yes, I know. I want to thank you again for all that you have done for a poor old woman. The love of the Lord Jesus sent you here. I can't tell you as I ought, but he has kept all the account, and some day he will say to you, 'Ye have done it unto me.'"

She spoke with difficulty, pausing several times ere she had reached the end. Edith leaned forward and stroked the old hand tenderly.

"I am only too glad to have done it for him," she said, with tears glistening in her eyes.

"Barb, Barb, child, don't cry," said Mrs. Blumm. "I can't see your face ; let me have your hand."

Barbara took the other hand, and repressing her sobs as well as she could, she leaned her cheek against it, for she could not speak.

"Miss Edith, please sing," the woman asked, presently.

Edith with difficulty controlled her emotions sufficiently to do so, but she made the effort and succeeded. Very tenderly she sang that dear old hymn that has soothed many a pathway both in life and in the hour of death :

"Jesus, lover of my soul."

"Ah, yes," murmured the poor old woman, as Edith sang the second line, "I'll be there soon—soon."

Those were the last words she spoke. When the hymn was finished, they thought she was asleep ; but it was the sleep of death.

Four days later, at almost the same hour, the two bodies were carried out from the two homes, and laid in the same cemetery. One followed by many carriages, and numerous friends and acquaintances ; the other mourned by Barbara and her husband, and Edith Hendry, and followed by a very small procession of friends and neighbors.

But angels bore the soul of the poor woman to heaven, "and the rich man died, and was buried."

CHAPTER XV.

THE MEDICAL COMMENCEMENT.

THE young man who, at the Hallberg Academy commencement took the mathematical prize, was awarded one of the most important ones offered at the commencement of the medical college. The Academy of Music was crowded, and was bright with fair young faces and glowing flowers. Edith Hendry was, of course, one of the audience. But Nora Read was *not* there ; for no one in whom she was interested was among the number of the graduates.

Clayton Carmon, it is true, had entered the course at the same time Paul Elverton had, and had been attending nominally ever since. But, in college parlance, "Clayton Carmon flunked on examination" ; in other words, he failed.

Not the slightest surprise was expressed among his associates at this fact ; indeed, a number of them, judging from the sort of work he had been doing for the past three years, had prophesied this result.

Clayton told his mother and Nora that unfair partiality had been shown, otherwise he would have been among the first, and would have taken the first prizes and honors. They believed this and pitied poor Clayton accordingly. Of course, nobody with a grain of common sense agreed with them.

"Is Paul Elverton going to graduate?" inquired Mrs. Carmon.

"Oh, yes! St. Paul is to graduate. The professors think Paul is perfection. They would manage to put him through if he couldn't tell B from a bull's foot. I suppose when he gets his parchment the goal of his ambition will be reached. But I never could be so easily satisfied. Even if I had been fairly treated and allowed to graduate here, I should wish to go to Berlin to finish. I tell you Germany is the place if you want to know something about medicine."

"Germany! Oh, Clayton! Germany is so far, so very far away!" exclaimed Nora; and the soft blue eyes that looked up at him said much more than her words.

Clayton looked down at her, and said, smiling:

"Wouldn't you like to travel, and see something of the world outside of our own little city?"

"It would cost a great deal to study medicine in Berlin, wouldn't it?" asked Mrs. Carmon.

"I suppose it would. I have not inquired; but the estate isn't bankrupt yet, that I know of," said Clayton, carelessly.

"Oh, certainly not!" replied Mrs. Carmon, quickly.

"And it was father's wish that I should be thoroughly equipped for my profession," added Clayton. The time for him to have remembered this was through all the three years past. "I suppose if I had spoken of it, he would have been willing for me to go to Germany in the first place. You remember what he said about my studying?"

"Yes, yes, I remember perfectly; and most certainly, if you wish to go there now to finish, you shall go. But we shall be very lonely without you, Clayton."

"Oh, well, as for that, mother, you know I have been away most of the time for the last three years, so it will not make so much difference. Of course, the advantages there are far superior to those here; and I

know you will be willing to make the sacrifice for my good."

"Oh, most certainly, if you think it best. I don't know anything about these matters. I always supposed the college you were attending was a most excellent one; and really I am surprised that your father should not have ascertained about it before he let you enter. But, if you say Germany is best, and you want to go there, of course, you must do so," said his mother.

It was presently decided that Clayton Carmon should go to the University at Berlin, to study medicine.

Then it was decided that, before he went, he and Nora Read should be married, and he would take her with him. Just how this was going to help him in his studies was not explained; but those were the plans.

Of course, there was to be a grand wedding at Nora's home, and the Carmon residence was to be thrown open for their reception, after a four weeks' wedding trip.

They would spend two or three weeks at home, and

then would sail for Germany; though by this time nearly all thought of the first object of their going thither had gradually faded from Clayton's mind.

In truth, the love of study or desire for knowledge had never seriously influenced him; and he had no more idea of hard work now than before. But there was the novelty and pleasure of travel, and he knew that his mother would supply him liberally with money—more liberally than his father, if living, would have thought proper. If he could get through, so much the better; and if he did not, why it would not make much difference. To spend his father's earnings was much more agreeable to him than to earn for himself.

Before these arrangements were all made, Clayton suggested to his mother the propriety of withdrawing the Carmon share of the partnership from the firm of Carmon & Senderling, adding that it would be well to place it where it could be easily reached, if needed, and vaguely insinuating that it might be safer thus now that his father was no longer there to see to his share of the interest.

Mrs. Carmon almost became hysterical at this hint,

and said she had always supposed Mr. Senderling and Rob to be very honest and trustworthy ; she knew that had been the opinion of her late husband ; but, if Clayton really thought there was any danger, of course it had better be withdrawn. She had already found his father's judgment to have been wrong in regard to the selection of a medical college, and it might be so in this matter too.

Perhaps it would be well too, to have it where it could easily be obtained if wanted. Mrs. Carmon did not know anything about these matters, and did not even want to learn. She did not stop to reflect that Clayton knew if possible still less, nor did she perceive that the young man who, during all these years in which his wants had been generously supplied by his too-indulgent father, had never learned the value of money, was quietly adjusting matters so that the portion of his father's estate which had been in his business, was now to be placed under his own very injudicious control ; for when withdrawn from the firm it was to be deposited in his name, and subject to his order.

There were railroad stocks and government bonds,

and other sources of revenue which still maintained the home establishment. Mrs. Carmon did not ask any questions. She merely took the money that her agents paid her, and imagined that the amounts that she sent regularly to Germany were quite sufficient to entirely support her son and his wife.

That young man thought otherwise, and regularly drew upon the principal deposited in his name until that was exhausted.

They were having a good and an easy time however, and that was an important item to both of them.

Before Clayton and his wife sailed for Germany, Paul Elverton entered upon his theological studies to complete his preparation for a medical missionary.

Here, as before, he worked with a strong and determined will, and also with a consecrated purpose. He felt the importance of the work before him as only those can who have a deep and abiding realization of the value of human souls. Christ Jesus gave his *life* for the souls of men. Should we rest easy while there are those who never heard of this wonderful love?

Paul Elverton could not, and he earnestly prayed to be used by the Master in whatever way would best serve the interest of his kingdom. He thought he was honest in that prayer, but sometimes when we are brought face to face with the answers to our own prayers, we hardly recognize them, and are almost startled at them.

Paul Elverton thought he understood exactly in what way he was to serve—as a medical missionary. But, after all, Paul might have been mistaken.

Still, it was God's plan that he should prepare for that life, and he was preparing conscientiously.

CHAPTER XVI.

REBA GOES TO ANOTHER EXTREME.

REBA ASHWOOD was beginning to see that the Lord would have mercy, and not sacrifice, and that the hearty service of her time in the ways that he had put into her power was more acceptable than for her to devote that time to a task the Lord had not asked of her. She was beginning to learn the truth of what Edith had said about the command, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee ;” that it was her own gift that was committed to her charge, and not her neighbor’s ; and that while she “verily thought within herself,” as Paul once did of old, that she ought to do the will of God in one way, she might be neglecting, or even in fact opposing, God’s way.

These lessons are not always easy to learn, and some natures are very like a pendulum ; when they cut loose from one error they are apt to swing away to the farthest point in the opposite direction. Reba’s nature was much of this kind.

Reba was honestly desirous to do what God required. She was not a little disturbed when she began to see her real motive and her serious error.

"Does God want my time?" she asked herself, honestly and very humbly. "I was wrong. I must give my time to the cause of Christ, for that is one of the gifts he has entrusted to me, and I must not neglect it. I will study my Bible more; I will think more, and make better use of my time."

She talked with Edith about this.

"You must help me," she said. "You must show me how to use my time for the Lord. You know my mother is not at all interested in charitable works, as your mother is. You must take me with you, and let me help you until I learn to go alone."

Edith consented gladly; and many an hour of faithful though humble and unrecorded service these two girls gave to the Lord.

Often it was only a trifling act of kindness or thoughtfulness; sometimes for the poor, and sometimes for the members of their own families. It took Reba longer to learn this last duty; but, gradually, she was learning that too.

While learning these things, Reba, as already intimated, was going to another extreme. She said :

“The Lord requires my time. I cannot, therefore, waste precious time over frizzes and pretty puffs, and smooth braids. There are more important duties in a Christian’s life; these things are not essential.”

Consequently, a torn braid, or a loose shoe button did not receive prompt attention—she had not time for them. Her hair was no longer kept with its former neatness, and the sense of propriety in the household was often offended by Reba’s careless attire.

Her mother scolded, her father frowned, and her brother provokingly felt her pulse, and wondered whether this new symptom of the disease was a dangerous one, and how soon they might reasonably hope for a turn in the fever.

Reba read Paul’s injunction that women “adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.” And then forgetting the meaning of the very first word of this quotation, and neglecting to read farther on, she missed the spirit of the whole.

Her jewels, the pretty trinkets that her father and mother had found pleasure in giving her on birthdays, and as Christmas gifts, lay unheeded in her drawer. She decided that one dress was as good as another for any occasion, and declared that the follies of fashion could no longer claim her attention.

Rob Senderling actually felt mortified one evening, when he had taken her to a lecture, by the utter want of care manifested in the whole appearance of this girl, whom he used to be so pleased to introduce to his friends.

Others noticed it too, and wondered what could have so changed Reba Ashwood. Edith Hendry spoke to her about it freely. To be neat in her attire had been a part of Edith's every-day training from very babyhood. She was not pretty, and she had never been vain enough to imagine that she was; but she had looked upon it almost as a religious duty to make herself neat, and as attractive as she honestly could in the eyes of those about her. For, thought she, how can a slovenly woman "*adorn* the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things"? How can an untidy woman be entirely "without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation"?

She knew that Reba was wrong, both in practice and theory. She never reasonably could hope to attract any member of her family toward religion while she offended their taste in matters of neatness and order.

Edith felt that her friend did not realize that she had a work to do in her own home—a work in which it was impossible to succeed in the present condition of affairs. She determined to go to see her.

It was not more than half past nine in the morning, and Edith was directed to her friend's room. When she entered that apartment she was really amazed. Reba had always had the care of her own room, for Mrs. Ashwood thought it best for her daughter to do this service for herself. Until recently it had been kept in the very perfection of neatness, and Edith was surprised beyond measure to see that now the room had shared the general untidiness of her dress.

Reba herself, in neglected attire, sat in the midst of her neglected apartment, studying her Bible. She looked slightly annoyed that Edith should have been admitted thus unexpectedly to her room. She knew

well what a contrast it must form to Edith's own. But after greeting her friend she resumed her seat, and drawing up another for Edith, she quickly referred to her reading. It was Christ's commission to evangelize the world.

"How my heart goes out to this work, Edith," she said. "No doubt you will go off to Armenia on a mission—you who always were contented with the present, and never had a lofty aspiration in all your life; and I shall be left here, longing to work, but unable to do so."

Edith flushed, but not altogether at the personal reference, though her engagement to Paul Elverton was not generally known. It was partly from a feeling of indignation that the girl's "lofty aspirations" should so entirely overlook all present and obvious duties. Still her voice was very quiet as she asked:

"Why don't you begin at home, Reba?"

"At home? Oh, I've nearly lost hope for them. Our Charlie is a perfect heathen. You ought to hear him talk sometimes. And both father and mother are very much opposed to my religion. It is very hard." And Reba sighed heavily.

"I should be opposed to it too, if I thought it was really your religion which has made the wonderful change there has been in you of late," said Edith, with as much of sharpness as ever came in her face and voice. "Come, Reba, let us set this room to rights, and after that we can sit down and talk of your aspirations."

CHAPTER XVII.

A GREAT CHANGE.

REBA rose with another long-drawn sigh. She felt that even Edith did not understand or appreciate her. As she laid aside her Bible, she remarked :

"I have been so absorbed in the study of the word of God, that I have not had time for this menial work. But I don't want you to help with it, Edith. Come, we will go down-stairs, and I can do this when I have leisure."

"I don't think it would be right for you to go down-stairs and leave it so," replied Edith, sorting out pins and hairpins, and putting all in their proper places.

"*Right?* Why not? I am sure I have been engaged in nobler things!" said Reba, reluctantly taking up a dress to hang in the closet.

"The noblest thing to be done at any moment is just the duty, however humble, that belongs to that moment. It would be nobler to wash dishes, when

washing dishes is our work, than it would be to teach the heathen, when teaching the heathen is not the work God has given into our hands," Edith replied. "Now, will you get the broom and duster and chamois, or shall I?"

Reba felt very much injured, but she went to get the needed articles.

She was gone for several minutes, and when she returned, Edith, having done all that could be done until these things were brought, stood by the window with Reba's Bible open in her hand. Before she laid it down she read, without comment, these words:

"Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."

She closed the book and took the broom. Both girls worked in silence for several moments. Presently Reba asked, a little curiously:

"Why did you read just that?"

"To remind us that when the Lord Jesus left his three days' sleeping place, although he had just come

from the most important event in all the world's history, and before him were but forty days yet of earthly teaching, the place of his repose was left in the most perfect neatness," replied Edith, as she quietly worked on.

The idea struck Reba just as her friend had intended it should. The girl was standing before the bureau polishing the long, heavy glass, with a chamois. She stopped and looked inquiringly at her own reflection. It was not a pleasing reflection. An untidy dress never is pleasing. At that moment Reba wondered if Christ ever appeared in an untidy dress. She felt certain that he never did. The rest of the arrangement of the room was finished without another word being spoken by either of the girls.

Then Reba took away the broom and duster. When she returned she found Edith again reading. She was now sitting down, as if prepared for comfort and a long talk.

The book was opened; but no word was needed just now. The passage which Edith had read aloud had served its purpose.

"I wonder if I shall ever, ever learn what is right?"

asked Reba, sorrowfully. "Indeed, I do want to serve the Lord, but I constantly mistake the way."

She stood before the glass again, and looked in with eyes from which the scales had fallen ; and, standing there, she made the honest confession :

"As you say, I do not wonder they are opposed—not so much to my religion, as to the ridiculous notions I somehow always tack on to it."

"But the Lord will help you to see your duty plainly if you ask him," said Edith.

"I do ask him, indeed I do, Edith," replied Reba. "But then somehow I get to looking at only one thing, and fail to see anything else. That causes all the trouble."

"I fear there are a great many one-sided Christians in the world," remarked Edith.

"I don't want to be a 'one-sided Christian'; but I am much afraid that I am just that now," remarked Reba, as she took a clean dress out of the closet, and then opened a drawer for a clean collar and cuffs.

"It is not the Lord's wish that you should be such ; and if you ask him, I am sure he will help you not to be," replied Edith, quietly.

Reba dressed and arranged her luxuriant dark hair almost in silence. Then she came and sat down opposite her friend. She looked much more like the bright, attractive girl of former times than like the one Edith met on entering the room.

"How about the heathen now? What do you think of commencing your work of evangelization at home now?" asked Edith, with a smile.

"With myself?"

"I did not mean that. I meant in your own family, instead of across the sea."

"At least I should be sure of less opposition now, and therefore I have better hopes of success," replied Reba, glancing down at her clean dress and neat appearance, which could not call forth the least displeasure now.

Edith looked at the book she still held open. She read the account of Esther.

"I hope you will obtain favor in the sight of those whom you would win for Christ," she said.

"Edith, I should have thought that wicked vanity yesterday; but somehow it seems like good, sound, common sense to-day," said Reba.

"Of course, there are two extremes, and perhaps one is as bad as the other," Edith hastened to say, as she remembered her friend's propensity for extremes. "It would be wrong for a Christian to dress to obtain favor merely for favor's sake, or simply to gratify selfish vanity. That would be as far from the spirit of Christ as the neglect of our friends' comfort and wishes could be. But I do believe God's children should do everything, even dress, for his glory," said Edith.

"Edith, you are an angel," cried the impulsive girl, leaning forward and giving Edith's hands a little, affectionate squeeze.

"I thought you knew me, Reba; but it seems you will have to be introduced," objected Edith.

"Well, at any rate, you are a dear, good girl. Don't you sometimes get tired, and even disgusted, with my childishness? Do you remember, Edith, we are twenty years old, both of us?"

"I often wonder at the Lord's patience with our childishness and slowness to learn. I feel that I might have learned much more in my twenty years," answered Edith, thoughtfully.

"I was thinking only about myself, Edith. But come down-stairs now. I want to sing for you a hymn I have been practicing of late—'Ashamed of Jesus.' Miss Wells sang it at our church the other night, and you admired it so much."

The two girls descended to the parlor, and Reba continued :

"I have come to the decision now, Edith, that perhaps the Lord wants me to use my voice for him, instead of giving up music, as I once proposed."

"Of course he does; otherwise he would never have given it to you. I am sure of that," replied Edith.

Reba sat down to the piano, and Edith gave herself up to the delight of listening.

Reba's voice was certainly a rare gift from God—strong, clear, sweet, rich, full, and under perfect control. It seemed to Edith to have now a power to sway hearts such as it never had before. Her listener was quieted and rested by the song.

"That is beautiful, Reba. Did you ever sing that for your parents?" asked Edith.

"Yes. I sang it only yesterday for mother, and

when I had finished, the only comment she made was to wish I would go and dress, for she was afraid callers might come in, and she would not like any one to see me as I was. I thought she did not appreciate it. But now I wonder if I did not myself voluntarily throw away my own power."

"I fear we too often do that, and in more ways than we think," said Edith, thoughtfully. *

Reba turned to the piano, and began to play softly, and presently to sing again. It was Francis Ridley Havergal's Consecration Hymn now. She stopped suddenly when she came to the lines:

"Take my voice, and let me sing,
Always—only—for my King."

"Edith, did you ever think about Jesus singing with his disciples? That made me see so clearly how wrong it was for me to give up my music. I think of it always now when I sing," she said.

"That is the secret, dear, of your new power. You do indeed now sing 'Always—only—for your King,'" replied Edith, rising, for her visit had already been protracted beyond its intended limits. "And singing so, he will bless you, I am sure."

"If I don't put too many obstacles in my own way," replied Reba, following her friend to the door.

God did bless her in the use of her voice for him. As Edith had said, there was a new power in her song, arising from her conscious desire to please Christ. And in the years of life that followed, that power was often and often used for the glory of God.

Since the night of that merry company when Reba had sung the simple hymn, "Hide Thou Me," her mother had felt a secret dissatisfaction and unrest, in the fact that she had no refuge in which to hide, when temptations or trials or sorrows overtook her.

That hymn became a decided favorite with Reba. She sang it often when she was alone, to cheer her soul. It brought so near the knowledge of the Refuge she had found in Jesus.

One day she thought herself alone, as she sang these words softly. The parlor was in dim light; only a ray shone from a partly-drawn curtain across the piano.

Mrs. Ashwood happened to be in the room. She had been fatigued by a morning's shopping, and had come in here to rest in the quiet and cool. She had

fallen into a light doze, but Reba's first note had awakened her. She looked with fond pleasure at the neat, graceful figure at the piano. The dash and extreme style which used to characterize Reba Ashwood's dress were wanting; but she was now truly adorned in modest apparel, which was far more becoming to the young girl than her former dashing style.

But Reba was singing, and Mrs. Ashwood forgot about the dress in listening to the song.

Unbidden tears sprang to her eyes, and fell unheeded over her cheeks and down upon her heaving bosom. Why had she never gone to that Refuge?

Reba's song changed. A few soft notes of prelude, and then she sang "Ashamed of Jesus."

Mrs. Ashwood had her answer. She had been held back from a known duty by a sense of shame. She had been ashamed of "that best friend"—ashamed to accept him as her Saviour, and to acknowledge him before her fashionable friends!

Reba finished and left the room, still unconscious of its one occupant; unconscious of the fact that God had used her voice to carry conviction to the heart of

her beloved mother—and that, too, by the singing of the very hymn whose power had once been lost through the untidy dress of the singer.

Melted by those beautiful words, sung with such thrilling tenderness, Mrs. Ashwood sat looking into her own heart; she saw its helplessness and its poverty. And then she looked up to a Saviour crucified for our transgressions, and risen again for our justification.

Long she had refused him; but now she accepted, with tears of contrition, Christ's offer of salvation.

The day her mother made a public profession of her faith in Christ was a wonderfully joyous day for Reba. And earnestly she thanked God for her voice, and the use she had been led to make of it, when she knew it had been instrumental in her mother's conversion.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WEDDING.

THE firm of Senderling & Son, formerly Carmon & Senderling, were passing through troubled waters. The failure of two or three large New York firms affected them, and there was danger that they would suffer serious loss.

This rumor reached Mrs. Carmon, and she complacently smoothed out the folds of her glossy black satin dress, and congratulated herself that the Carmon portion of the business had been safely withdrawn long before this danger threatened. She felt very glad that she had followed her son's advice. She little imagined that the exhaustion of that sum had much to do with her son's presently expressed desire to leave Germany.

She wrote to Clayton about the rumor. In his reply he wrote her a glowing account of her little grandson, who was now nearly a year old, and also wrote that his wife's health was not strong, and he

feared he should have to return to America before he had fully completed his studies.

He did not state that he had in reality attended but few lectures, devoting most of his time to the pleasure, as he said, of his wife ; though really their tastes were so much alike, and they so perfectly agreed in ease-loving and indolence, that her pleasure was his.

Mrs. Carmon wrote back that health was always and under all circumstances a consideration of the first importance, and that she was “just dying” to see the baby ; so they had better come home immediately.

Five years had been spent in the (supposed) study of medicine ; but at the end of it Clayton had gained no medical knowledge, and was, of course, without a diploma. And now, at twenty-five years of age, he was incapable of taking up honest, earnest life-work in any direction.

He returned with his wife and child, and by the time he arrived the firm of Senderling & Son had weathered the storm of adverse circumstances, and was again upon a sound financial basis.

Moreover, on the very evening that they were

welcomed home, there was a quiet but pleasant gathering at the Ashwood residence, and Reba Ashwood was married to the junior member of that promising firm.

Rob Senderling was now where he had said he hoped one day to be, though really he was there earlier than he had anticipated. The withdrawal of the Carmon portion of the business had made some changes necessary.

He and Reba had talked about being married before this, but while business was so unsettled the marriage had been postponed. A small but pleasant house had been purchased by Rob; the furniture was a joint present from the two fathers; for they were to go immediately to housekeeping. They were not even to take a wedding-trip. After the ceremony at her father's, followed by the wedding supper and congratulations, the young couple were driven to their new home; for they were to begin to feel at once that it was their home.

While Rob Senderling had succeeded in temporal affairs, he had not been idle in spiritual work. He possessed a great advantage from the fact that his

father was in the field before him, and not only led the way, but always helped him forward.

Mr. Senderling knew perfectly well that a Christian life, to be healthful, must be an active one. His own had been such, and he took Rob to be his friend and co-worker.

The young man thus found his place at once, in the active work of the church, rendering the service of an honest, thoroughly consecrated, and well-educated life and heart.

Home training does make a vast difference. If Reba's mother had been like Edith's, it would have been almost impossible for the former to run into such extremes as she did.

Mr. Senderling had always sought guidance from the great Source of all wisdom in all that he had done for his son.

One day, when Rob and Reba were together attending to the arrangement of some of the furniture in their new home before their marriage, Reba had said :

“Rob, I want this to be like the house at Bethany —a place where Jesus will come and rest. He came there, because he loved and was loved.”

Rob did not answer for several moments; still Reba knew that her words had not fallen upon unheeding ears. Presently he turned to her, and said :

"Reba, I'm glad to hear you say this. I had myself thought of it. We will ask him to dwell with us from the very first."

In accordance with this, the very first evening of their arrival, the altar of family prayer was raised in their home.

A week or two after their marriage, Reba was at her old home one day, looking over some seldom-used books in the library. From between the leaves of one a newspaper clipping fell. She took it up, and saw that it was a poem that some one had cut out for careful preservation. She had not read far before she discovered that it was from this poem her mother had made extracts for the album she had given her so long ago, and whose incitement to "do something" had had so strong an influence upon her young life.

Her mother had copied but a portion of the poem, and now Reba read it entire. These lines lingered in her memory :

"Pray heaven for firmness thy whole soul to bind
To thy one purpose—to begin, pursue,
With thoughts all fixed and feelings purely kind,
Strength to complete, and with delight review,
And grace to give the praise where all is due."

"There have been two troubles with my doing," she said, half aloud. "I had a half-dozen purposes instead of one, and I wanted too much of the praise for myself. I see it now. Lord, help me to live for the single purpose of thy glory."

CHAPTER XIX.

PAUL'S UNEXPECTED SUMMONS.

JUNE twenty-eighth was a beautiful, balmy, summer day—as beautiful and as cloudless as the most superstitious bride could have wished. The bride who was “adorning herself for her husband” on this day was not in the least superstitious. She knew that God ruled, and ruled wisely and well for all of his children. This was the day appointed for Edith Hendry’s marriage to Paul Elverton.

Paul had finished his theological preparations for his carefully and conscientiously planned life work. He had received his appointment as a medical missionary to the land to which his heart had so long turned. And now, on the twenty-eighth day of June, he was to be married to one whom he loved truly and well. There were to be farewell services to the missionaries in a great city church, and even the tickets for their voyage had been bought.

Edith had said once that she would do the best she

could wherever God placed her ; if alone, then alone ; or, if beside some noble worker for the Master, she would try to be his inspiration to higher and nobler aims than those already attained.

This she had been to Paul Elverton almost ever since the day she had said it, and even before ; for he had never forgotten the kindly smile on the morning of his graduation, and had never ceased to strive to be worthy of the girl who had given it.

Paul had come home on the twenty-second of June, intending to remain until after the important twenty-eighth. But two days previously he had suddenly been summoned back to the city to the deathbed of a distant relative.

“ Must you go ? ” Edith had asked in dismay. But even before he had time to answer she answered herself : “ Yes, you must go. It is selfish in me to wish to keep you ; but when will you be back ? ”

“ Some time before nine o’clock the day after to-morrow, you may be sure of that,” he said, playfully, as he looked down into the earnest face, and lifted a stray curl tenderly in his fingers. Then he added : “ I do not know exactly, Edith. I will write to you as soon

as I get there and see how matters stand. It seems to us unfortunate that this summons comes at this time ; but God rules, and his plans do not clash even though we cannot account for them. But no circumstances shall keep me away from you later than Thursday tea time. I will come earlier if possible."

" You mean no circumstances that you can control," corrected Edith.

" Certainly. I know that our times are in God's hands, but I cannot imagine that he would keep me from you then. I must go at once, Edith. Good-bye. 'The Lord watch between thee and me while we are absent one from another.' "

There were tears in Edith's eyes, and yet there was a happy, confident smile upon her lips as she watched her lover go. It would not be long, only till the day after to-morrow, and then she would have him always.

She had only recently heard of the existence of this uncle. In fact, neither Paul nor his uncle had known each other until a year or so before. Then Paul had happened to meet the friendless old man, and had an opportunity to be kind to him. He was very old, and apparently entirely alone in the world. Something in

that loneliness had touched Paul ; perhaps because he had known in his own life what loneliness meant. Since they had first met he had brightened many an otherwise desolate hour in the old man's life.

His name was also Paul Elverton. Indeed, it was that fact which led to the discovery of their relationship. Paul had been a family name for generations back.

The elder Paul lived alone, except for a servant, who prepared his meals, made his bed, swept and dusted his rooms, and mended his clothes, and asked no questions. In that last point she suited him exactly.

The young man knew absolutely nothing about his uncle's past history. He had asked a question or two once ; but the subject was evidently distasteful to the elder man, and it had never been spoken of again between them.

Paul was now summoned to his deathbed, and so far as he knew he was the only relation living to come to it.

The old man died early on Thursday morning. When Paul asked if anybody else should be sent for,

or if there were any messages to be delivered, a feeble voice replied in the negative. The old man told Paul where to find his will and a few other papers of value, and added that they would give all necessary information when he was gone.

And so he died.

Paul closed the glazed eyes and composed the aged limbs for their narrow resting-place. He also gave directions to the servant, and made arrangements about the funeral. There was no one else to attend to anything.

He found the will and the other papers just where he had been directed to look. He would not open the package now, but he thought it safest to take it with him.

By the time all this had been attended to, the afternoon was fast advancing. He looked at his watch, and calculated that he had just time to make the train that would take him home by five o'clock. Leaving matters in the hands of the woman and the help he had procured for her, and promising to return for the funeral, he hastened to the depot.

But he reached there one-half minute too late. The

train had gone, the last train that went to Hallberg before midnight—and this his wedding evening.

He stood there in the direst dismay. It was no comfort to find that his usually reliable watch had unaccountably lost three minutes.

What should he do? Disappoint Edith?

"No; I'll walk first!" he said, impetuously, though he knew perfectly well that it was impossible.

But he must do something. He must make some effort. Even if it were not a successful one, it would be better than waiting passively; he could not do that.

He had already scanned the time schedule for the road, and knew perfectly well that there were no trains after the one that had just gone until one at midnight; but with that despairing hope which must be held accountable for many a foolish question, he asked the ticket agent what time the next train started for Hallberg.

"Twelve o'clock, sir," was the already known response, though Paul sighed to hear the words.

The ticket agent was not very busy, and noticed the troubled face—a face, by the way, that he remembered to have seen frequently before.

"If you wish to reach Hallberg sooner, your best plan would be to go as far as Danton, on the South Shore Road. Then you would only be twelve miles from there, and could probably drive across," said the ticket agent.

The suggestion was accepted at once. The train for Danton started in ten minutes (the longest ten minutes Paul Elverton ever remembered, however), and if at Danton he could secure a conveyance without delay, he would no doubt reach Hallberg—not, indeed, as soon as he expected, but yet well before the important hour of nine.

Before he started, he telegraphed to Edith :
"Have been unexpectedly detained, but will be
there on time."

Perhaps it was only Paul's impatience; but if questioned, he certainly would have told you that the South Shore Road did not make nearly as rapid time as other roads. However, they did reach Danton at last.

It was nearly sunset now. At any other time he would probably have noticed the long shadows cast by the level sun rays, that Edith loved so much. At

any other time he would probably have seen what a pretty, quiet little village this was, with its houses built separately, and set back from the road in tastefully arranged gardens. Had he known that this was his last opportunity for ever looking upon such a scene, would he not have looked now?

But he did not know. He did not think of anything now except securing a conveyance that should take him to his loved one.

Many a silent prayer had been breathed during that afternoon. In the midst of tumult and travel he had entered into the closet of his heart, and, shutting the door, had prayed with fear and trembling that no circumstances which should be beyond his control (how Edith's words rang again and again in his ears; how he had striven to comfort himself again and again by his answer to her about God's plans being right and never clashing) should keep him from her to-night—their wedding night.

It was hard for him to add “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” Still in his heart he thought he said it.

He soon engaged a man with a quick team to drive

him to Hallberg, and it seemed now that no farther hindrance was to be looked for. Paul's hopes rose and his fears vanished as they drove rapidly towards his destination. The sun set, the twilight deepened, and the crescent moon threw a half-light over the quiet earth. Still they were driving rapidly onward.

CHAPTER XX.

WAITING FOR THE BRIDEGROOM.

"**A** TELEGRAM? Can it be from Paul?
Can anything be the matter?"

Edith turned deathly pale, and her trembling hands could scarcely tear open the envelope.

A strange, unaccountable feeling of dread had been with Edith all the day. It was not strange that her first thought should be of her absent lover.

Paul had written twice to her during his short absence, and she had comforted herself by many readings of those dear missives.

Still a feeling of dread, which she could neither account for nor throw off, was ever present with her.

This caused her to start with nervous apprehension when the telegram was put into her hands.

It was from Paul, but it was merely to assure her that he would be there though he had been delayed.

The sun of this June day had already set. Edith had watched the long shadows across the lawn, and

listened to the twittering of the birds as they went to their evening rest, all the while wondering where Paul was now, and what had detained him.

The two girls who were to be her bridesmaids chattered away about the dresses and gloves, laces and flowers. Edith said but little, only when occasionally they wondered at Paul's detention, she said :

"He will be here. He never disappointed me in his life, and, if God wills, he will come now."

Presently lights twinkled forth from the windows, and after a while the friends who were bidden came by twos and threes and half dozens, making a continual buzz of arrivals, greetings, and mutual inquiry and laughter.

Over in the sitting-room the presents were looked at and discussed ; everywhere was the sound of glad voices, and the sight of glad faces, except in Edith's room.

There sat the girl in her pure white bridal dress, her slender form enveloped in the fleecy cloud of her long graceful veil, fastened by a spray of orange blossoms.

How she listened to every carriage, as it drove

up ! How she strained her ear to catch the sound of the voice, or the step of her lover ! But she heard neither. Paul came not.

Eight o'clock struck, nine o'clock. The guests down-stairs began to look at their watches.

Edith's father looked anxious as he watched every arrival, and her mother came again and again to her room.

"Something serious must have occurred. What did his telegram say ?" was asked, repeatedly.

"Have been unexpectedly detained, but will be there on time." It was read until they all knew it by heart.

"Yes, Paul would have come through fire and flood almost," Edith said. "Something that God knew about, but he did not, must have kept him."

Half-past nine o'clock, ten, eleven. But no Paul.

The circumstances of the unexpected call to the city, the death of his relative, and the telegram were discussed again and again ; as such things will always be discussed at a time like this. There were various conjectures and theories and questions; but no certainties could be attained.

Reba Senderling was admitted to her friend's room, but she had no words to say ; what good could words do now ? She only put her arms tenderly around the sorrowful girl, kissed her softly, and then left the room again.

The guests down-stairs left. The two bridesmaids had no words that could comfort their friend ; so they went across the hall to the room that had been assigned to them.

Then Mrs. Hendry came and strained her daughter in a long, close embrace.

"Can I do anything for you, my dear child ?" she asked.

"Only pray for Paul."

"Shall I stay with you ?"

"No, go and rest. Leave me alone with my Heavenly Father."

Then Edith, still arrayed in her bridal robe, knelt beside her bed ; and there, alone, came the first tears to her relief. Far into the night she knelt and prayed —prayed for Paul :

"O Father, wherever he is, take care of him ! If thou canst spare his life, oh, spare it ! Whatever

occurrence in thy providence thou hast sent to him, may it eventually be to thy honor and glory. Whatever his circumstances or condition just now, go to him with the comfort of thy love, and sustain his spirit. Make me strong to bear whatever thou dost send. Make us both willing and obedient servants!" Such was the burden of her prayer.

Twelve, one, two o'clock, and Edith was still kneeling there.

Other wakeful eyes were in the house that night; but all was wrapped in the stillness usual to the hour.

Suddenly there came a sound upon the air. It was the far-off, yet approaching, sound of wheels. They stopped before the gate; there was the click of the iron latch, and the sound of wheels upon the graveled drive within.

Edith's heart almost stood still. Was it his mangled body brought home to her from some horrible accident? Was it——?

But Edith strove to still her fears. She only prayed: "Lord, give me strength to say thy will be done."

The moon cast a dim light over the scene on which Edith looked through her partly closed blinds.

Her father, who had heard the approach also, was at the front door as soon as the carriage reached it. Edith heard low voices, but could catch no word—not a sound of the voice she longed to hear.

She saw a man helped from the carriage. His face and head were bandaged in a way to defy recognition; but the form seemed to her that of Paul.

He entered the house leaning upon the arm of her father, and she saw him put his hand out, as if feeling his way. The men in the carriage drove off again.

Edith trembled so that she could scarcely stand, yet remain longer where she was, she could not. A moment later, and she stood in the sitting-room door, guided thither by the light and the voices. What an incongruous scene! Everywhere were the traces of last evening's company. A large table was spread with the gifts that had been brought in honor of the bride-to-be, and the air was laden with the perfume of flowers. And there was Paul—her Paul—on the easy lounge, with Mr. and Mrs. Hendry by his side.



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They turned at the sound, as the white figure approached. Paul turned his head slightly too ; but he could not see what they did.

"Edith, have you not undressed yet?" exclaimed Mrs. Hendry.

But Edith scarcely heard the question. She knelt beside the lounge.

"Paul," she whispered, "I am here, Paul."

"My darling, God knows how I wanted to come—how I tried to come."

"You need not tell me, Paul. I am sure of it. I am so thankful that you are living. I feared, Paul, though I prayed all the time. But you must not tell me about it now," and she drew the poor, bandaged head close to her bosom, where it willingly rested for a moment.

Then, as if hurt, stung by a sudden thought, he turned away, and his husky voice told the depth of his emotion.

"Edith, my Edith ! I cannot blight your life by linking it to one that is now darkened forever. I am blind, Edith. My hopes for a life of usefulness in the Lord's vineyard are dashed to pieces in a moment.

Of what use can I be now? None, none. But the Lord has much for you to do, Edith."

"Blind, Paul? Blind?" asked Edith, in low, agonized tones. She could not even pray; her heart seemed to stand still in the conscious presence of God. That very consciousness brought her strength presently.

"Yes, blind." He repeated the word in a tone of despair.

"Then I must be eyes for you," she replied.

"Of what use can I be now?" he repeated. "I must give up my hopes of being a missionary. What can a blind servant do?"

"I do not know exactly, but the Lord does. Paul, he makes no mistakes. I have been praying all night, Paul, that God would spare your life, and that whatever he sent we might see to be for his glory. It is hard, very hard to see it now; but we must trust him—trust him, Paul."

"I have worked so hard all these years, and now in an hour it has come to nothing," said the young man, sadly.

"No it has not come to nothing. What we do for

God never does, and I know you were working for him. Paul, we must trust him, even in this dark hour."

He did not speak for several moments. Then he said:

"Edith, you cannot imagine how horribly disfigured I shall be for life."

"Hush," said Edith, laying her hand over his mouth. "Nothing but sin can disfigure your soul, and that is what I love, Paul. But we must talk no longer. You need rest."

The doctor, for whom Mr. Hendry had sent immediately after Paul's arrival, now came, and said the same.

He found, however, that the young man's wounds had been dressed with such skill that there was nothing to do now but to prescribe rest, which was indeed much needed after such a day and night.

We must now go back to the time of Paul's departure from Danton.

Two-thirds of the distance between Danton and Hallberg had been accomplished, and Paul was looking forward to speedily reaching his destination.

They were approaching the town of Afton, the only town of any considerable size on the route, when the horse, a fiery animal that had been chosen for this occasion on account of his speed, shied violently at some object, which the dim moonlight served more to suggest than to reveal.

The driver was unguardedly talking to the man beside him, and the frightened beast reared and plunged aside, and then dashed forward.

Paul was thrown from his seat, and hurled with force against a hard, cragged rock by the roadside. When the horse was brought under control, and they returned to him, they found that he was stunned and dreadfully wounded about the face.

He was carried to a drug store in Afton, and his wounds dressed. But a sharp corner of the rock against which he had been thrown had caused the entire loss of one eye, and rendered the other sightless.

In the midst of his suffering he thought of Edith. He knew how anxious she would be. And his urgent entreaties obtained the permission of the surgeon to proceed on his painful and now long-belated journey.

What then? Had all his prayers been lost? Was God unmindful or unkind?

No. God is not unmindful when he does not give us our requests just as we ask them. He who sees to the end loves us too well to give us any but the best blessings that can be bestowed. We do not always see how this is; but that is not saying that it is not so.

CHAPTER XXI.

ROB AND CLAYTON IN CONVERSATION.

“**G**OOD-MORNING, Carmon. I heard that you had returned some weeks ago, though oddly enough we have not met in all this time. How are you? Well, I hope?”

“Oh, yes! I can’t complain on that score.”

Rob Senderling spoke with the briskness and heartiness which characterized whatever he did. And Clayton Carmon answered, in his usual good-natured, indolent tone.

“Have you opened an office here in Hallberg?” asked Rob.

Clayton Carmon flushed slightly; but he was not thrown from his easy indifference by this question.

“No. The fact is, I have about given up the idea of practicing my profession. It isn’t a very easy life to be at everybody’s beck and call, and called up at any hour of the night that any one takes it into his

head to send for you. I think I'd rather be excused!" said Clayton, shrugging his shoulders.

"Of course, it isn't an easy life; anybody could have told you that five years ago! But what are you going to do, man? Waste all these years that you have been studying?"

Clayton did not say that they had already been wasted, though that would have been the truth. He only replied, in a careless tone:

"As for that, knowledge of any sort is never a burden to carry; and you know it is not financially necessary for me to practice. I guess I will turn agent for the estate. There is no occasion for mother to retain the men that have been doing business for her during my absence."

It was only the first part of this speech that claimed Rob's attention; and to it he replied:

"Of course, knowledge is no burden to carry; but then it is of no use unless we practically make it so. If one has knowledge that may be of service to others, one ought to use it for others; and if, as you say, there is no financial necessity for you to practice, there is much suffering that you might relieve among

a class who cannot afford to pay for medical service. It seems to me God has put into your hands a rare opportunity to work for him."

Rob was speaking from false premises. Clayton had not this knowledge, though he had had every opportunity to gain it. Every man is responsible, not only for what he is, but for what he has had the opportunity to become. Some one has said, you know: "Close beside every man there walks the ghost of what he might have been."

Clayton drew himself up haughtily, and replied, in frigid tones:

"Excuse me, Senderling; but you know I never did believe in that sort of nonsense. You cannot convince me that it makes the least particle of difference to the Lord what I individually do."

"I wish I could convince you; for I am sure it is true; and it will make a great deal more difference some day to you than it can to him," replied Rob, seriously.

"Nonsense! if he governs these things, as you suppose, why did he let Paul Elverton go stone-blind just when he was ready to begin what he imagined to be

his grand and appointed life work? How are those who serve him better off than those who do not? I tell you it is nonsense, the whole of it! Anyway, if there is a God, he doesn't need our knowledge, and it doesn't make any difference to him what I do with mine."

"It has been well said, 'he doesn't need our ignorance, either,'" said Rob, significantly. "If we could look into all of God's plans, and could know just the work that he designed for Paul Elverton to do, we might perhaps venture to pass judgment as to the wisdom of this providence. But as we do not know, we have no right to question. Paul himself feels that he has no right to do anything but trust and wait."

"If he can do so, I am sure he is welcome to such poor comfort," replied Clayton, with a sneer.

"I do not think you would call it 'poor comfort,' if you could talk to him for a while. He is wonderfully sustained in what we all must feel to be a very sad affliction. Edith's faith is beautiful, and she has been a great help to him in these dark hours. At one time he felt almost like despairing; but she pointed him upward, and prayed for him with unwavering faith."

"By the way," asked Clayton, carelessly, "is Edith going to marry him now, blind and disfigured as he is?"

"Most certainly she will; why not?" asked Rob, with some indignation at the cool question.

"Oh, well; every one to his liking. I did not know that Paul would wish to take advantage of her promise given under such different circumstances. What will he do now to support a wife? For he is only a poor fellow. Will he go and live at her home?"

"You are mistaken in several particulars. Paul is not the man to take unfair advantage of any one. I know that he offered to release Edith from her engagement, and she refused. And I assure you, Paul is of too independent a character to be willing to live in the way you mention. Moreover, he is not the poor man he once was."

The last statement was quite in Clayton's line, and he replied :

"Indeed? I supposed him to be as poor as a church mouse. His fortunes must have changed since the day he graduated in a gray suit. Did some fairy

queen turn up in the nick of time, as they always did in the story books of our youth?" he asked, half mockingly.

"The fairy was in the form of an old and desolate uncle—or great uncle, I believe it was—whom he met in the city while pursuing his studies. It was when returning from his deathbed that Paul met with his terrible accident. The old gentleman was much pleased with Paul's studiousness, perseverance, and Christian kindness, and he has left all his property to him. I understand it is of considerable value; and I, for one, am heartily glad for Paul."

"Oh, to be sure. I am too," replied Clayton. "Of course, in that case, it isn't so bad for Edith, though I always thought she might have done better."

Rob turned and looked at the man beside him, while some of the contempt which he felt found expression in his face. Clayton was at that moment absorbed in watching rays of light reflected from his diamond ring, and did not see that expression.

"I should not consider that Edith needed much of your pity, even if this independence had not come to Paul. He has become strong by climbing. He can-

not now be contentedly useless, though blind. His life of hard discipline has made him such a man as one rarely meets ; and it is my opinion that the world will hear from him yet, if not in Armenia, in America. The world needs more such men, and will listen to them.”

Clayton shrugged his shoulders again.

“ All very grand, I suppose ; but I am no friend to ‘climbing,’ or ‘hard discipline’ either, I confess. I would rather be unheard of in the world, than to go through hardships to gain a hearing. My ambition is not so high.”

“ You misunderstand me, if you think I mean that it was Paul’s ambition to be known. It is not. I remember hearing him say once that it made little difference whether or not he was ever known in the world, if by his life he could let others know of his Master. His only ambition is to glorify Christ by doing the will of God. He has lived his life conscientiously ; and God has honored, and I believe will honor him,” said Rob.

“ Oh, well ; as you please. I don’t know that I am especially interested in the matter,” said Clayton,

carelessly. "Probably you know by this time that my highest ambition is to have an easy time in life."

"Not a very exalted one, it strikes me," said Rob.

"Exalted enough to suit me. In fact, any other is rather too much trouble. And what is the use in it?" remarked Clayton.

"Well," said Rob, rather dryly, "it is a fact there does not seem to be much use in some people living. Still, it is largely their own fault. God has put us here to glorify him, and to be active, useful helpers to each other. We cannot do this by seeking our own ease. Clayton, why not look at these things seriously? Don't you see how you propose wasting your whole life? And what excuse can you offer for it?"

"To whom need I offer an excuse, pray? You are not my judge, though you seem to be trying to assume that dignity," said Clayton, loftily.

"No, indeed I am not. But there is one Judge, even God."

Rob spoke very seriously. Clayton, however, assumed an air of careless indifference as he made answer :

"Well, I assure you I am an exceedingly clever

fellow, and never knowingly did anything so very wicked. For what do you think he can hold me accountable?"

"Perhaps it will be on the score of what you have left undone, rather than for what you have done. God has given you large opportunities for good, and you are deliberately throwing them all aside. And, for the life to come, how can you hope to escape if you neglect so great salvation? Seriously, Clayton, it is time you thought of these things," urged Rob.

"And, seriously, I have no notion of doing any such thing; and you are wasting breath to think of it," replied Clayton. "It would be very hard indeed to judge a fellow for what he has not done." And he reiterated that he had little interest in anything, or any one, so long as he himself could have an easy time.

CHAPTER XXII.

CLAYTON AS CLERK.

CLAYTON CARMON succeeded in persuading his mother to entrust the management of her affairs to him, and the result was what might have been expected.

The Carmon residence was once more thrown open to society, Clayton and Nora welcoming their friends with lavish hospitality. For a while everything seemed to be going on well. But before long Clayton discovered that they were living beyond their now diminished income. This was not a pleasant discovery, and he frowned and assumed an air of serious determination, saying: "Something must be done."

It did not, however, seem to occur to him that this "something" ought to be to lessen present expenses, or for him to enter upon some work that would increase their income. Extravagant habits had grown upon him till they seemed a necessity; and as for work, that would be a very unwelcome duty.

Clayton had once said that if he found himself in financial difficulties he would marry a rich woman. He had married one who had every prospect of wealth, but her father was no longer a rich man. Mr. Read had failed in business ; and now, in his old age, he had to begin at the bottom of the ladder, and it was with great difficulty that he could meet the demands of a large family, the members of which had never been taught the first lesson of self-denial. It was therefore useless to look for help from him.

When Clayton told his wife how matters stood, she raised her blue eyes to him in the greatest amazement, and asked :

“What is to be done? What can be done? I don’t see how we can help it! It is very unfortunate that father has lost all his money. But what is to be done?”

After asking her vain and hopeless question, Nora gave her nurse directions concerning the dark-blue velvet suit in which Clayton, Jr., was to be dressed, and the light merino to be worn by her little girl for an afternoon visit, and then she settled herself to a bit of useless fancy work, as if that were the end and aim of life.

"Something must be done!" Clayton reiterated. And at that moment it did enter his mind to regret the poor use he had made of his time when pretending to study medicine.

Just then he saw Rob Senderling driving past in his carriage, with his wife and little daughter. And for a moment he regretted that he had not gone into the store when Rob did. Still there were the old objections. He knew that even yet Rob was generally pretty closely confined to the business—and that did not suit his notions.

But he still frowned, and said: "Something must be done!" His capital meanwhile was dwindling away at a rapid rate. One day he heard of the successful speculation of a friend, in a matter with about as much business principle in it as is found in the workings of an ordinary lottery. Still, that was no objection to Clayton's mind. To derive profit from something on which he had bestowed no labor suited his ideas exactly. The whole plan struck him as an exceedingly good one, and he decided to invest. In imagination, he saw wonderful fortunes before him. In reality, he lost all that he invested.

A somewhat similar operation was one day, not long after, proposed to him, and he spoke of it to Rob Senderling. The young business man gathered his brow into a thoughtful frown as he listened, and then advised his friend to "steer clear of any such schemes to swindle the unwary."

Clayton did not take this advice, but foolishly said that Rob was jealous of his prospects of success.

It is true he had lost before, but he was sure he would win this time.

But he did not.

In less than two years Clayton Carmon had nothing left of the handsome fortune that might have been such a help, but that really had proved such a hindrance, to him in life. Even the house in which they lived was no longer theirs, for he had mortgaged it so heavily that he could hardly hope to pay the interest.

His mother complained bitterly, and was as unreasonable in her fault-finding as she had been in her former over-indulgence. But now indeed something must be done. He had borrowed money of whoever had been willing to lend it. That number was grow-

ing rapidly less, and it was evident that now he must do something himself.

After some consideration he applied to his old school friend, Rob Senderling, for a situation in his employ. He felt that it was mortifying in the last extreme to go to him, but what else could he do? He had a wife and three children now to support, and their support meant a great deal.

"I don't know what I have ever done to deserve such hard luck," he said, dolefully.

"This is no time for a lecture, or I should undoubtedly be tempted to tell you it is just what you have not done that has brought you to this," Rob replied.

"I have heard that nonsensical opinion of yours before. Some people are born to be unfortunate, and certainly I am one of them. The fates are against me," said Clayton.

"A man's own self is a greater enemy to his good fortune than 'the fates' can be. If you had taken up any proper work when you left school, and stuck to it like a man, you would not have been where you are to-day. If 'the fates' (I do not believe in them,

you know) could have done their worst, they could not have harmed you."

Clayton moved uneasily. He could not help acknowledging the truth of these plain words. He answered in sullen, dogged tones :

" Well, if you are pleased to look at it so, you may. But talking of the past does not help either the present or the future."

" Not unless you learn a lesson from the past by which you can profit for the future," replied Rob. " But what do you want at present? A position in the store?"

" What have you to offer ?" asked Clayton, and he flushed as if he felt that he were doing something beneath his dignity.

" There is no position now available, except that of salesman. We might take another on in the dress goods department, for the busy season is approaching."

This was the very department and the very counter to which Clayton would have gone, if he had accepted his father's offer years ago when he had just left school. He could not help remembering that at this moment.

"What salary do you pay?"

Rob mentioned the amount. Clayton curled his lip in contempt, though in his present need he had no actual idea of refusing the position.

"That would about keep me in cigars and my wife in bonbons," he replied.

"Very well. I wish you success in obtaining something better, though I think you will find the wages I mention will compare favorably with those of any business house in town for a like position. Good-morning!"

Rob bowed and turned to meet a young man who had entered a moment before, and now stood at a little distance apparently awaiting an interview.

He was an applicant for a position. He wished to learn the business, and offered excellent testimonials.

Rob consulted his father, and the result was that the young man was presently established in the position that for a second time had been offered to Clayton.

It was nearly two months before Rob and he met again. It had been two months of rapid failure for him; two months of exceedingly unhappy domestic

relations; two months in which he was looking for something to do; two months of useless regret for the past.

At the end of that time he dejectedly remarked that "half a loaf was better than no bread at all," and once more he visited the store of Senderling & Son.

The young man who had been taken on the morning of his former application had shown himself so faithful, apt, and desirous to learn the business in all its branches, that he had just been called to another position.

The spring trade was over, and the dull time usual in the summer did not absolutely require another in his place at present. Still the place was vacant, and Rob remembered it.

"I do not see that we can help you," he said, when he learned Clayton's errand. "We have no vacancy except that of salesman, and that you do not wish."

But now Clayton swallowed his pride, and most ungraciously entered upon his new duties. He never took more interest in what he was doing than barely sufficient to insure his pay. If he ever dreamed of

promotion, his hopes were never realized; for he was never found worthy of it.

One morning Rob stood by his counter, ostensibly looking for a piece of handsome goods from which he wished a dress pattern to be sent home to his wife. His chief object, however, was to gain the opportunity to speak to Clayton alone, before any customers came into the store.

Clayton watched him for a few moments in silence, and then exclaimed :

“ Well, Rob, who would ever have thought that things would come to this pass! You the employer, and I the poor employée. But I believe some men were born to misfortune. I am sure I can’t see that I deserve so hard a life.”

“ We will not speak of that just now,” replied Rob. “ You have long neglected the salvation that Christ offers to you, and I fear that you are in danger of losing infinitely more in the life to come than——”

“ Nonsense!” cried Clayton, interrupting him with his usual air of superior knowledge. But Rob was not to be interrupted; for he felt very much in

earnest, and was anxious to finish what he had to say before any customers were likely to come in.

"There is no nonsense about it, Clayton. You have lived long enough to learn how much may be lost by neglect of earthly possessions. But the matters of eternity are of infinitely greater importance than these. And there is no hope of escape if we neglect Christ. Let me earnestly beg of you to give serious consideration to these important matters."

"One might suppose I was a Hottentot heathen to hear you talk," said Clayton, churlishly.

"No, you are not; but if you persist in refusing to listen to the invitations of Christ, and close your eyes to the light, it would be better for you if you had been."

"I have heard quite enough of your preaching," said Clayton, assuming an air of dignity. "If I am obliged to degrade myself to be in your employ, it does not follow that I must listen patiently to all the insults that you choose to offer." Clayton drew himself up and turned aside.

Rob was too deeply grieved for words, and went sadly away from the counter.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SAD CLOSE OF CLAYTON'S LIFE.

THE young man who occupied the position of clerk at the dress goods counter next to Clayton Carmom, in the firm of Senderling & Son, was an expert penman, and not infrequently the moments that were unoccupied with customers were spent in practicing penmanship.

It occurred that the afternoon before the conversation which we have recorded between Rob Senderling and his former school-fellow took place, had been a dull, rainy one, during which comparatively few purchasers had been out ; and he had written over a great sheet of wrapping-paper with his clear, round, beautiful characters and pretty, fancy flourishes.

There was one sentence traced there oftener than any other. Over and over again, almost as if it had been a set task, were the words :

“Every man is the architect of his own fortunes.”

There were other quotations there: two or three of

poetry and several from the Bible, and one or two from well-known words of public men; and then there were the firm names and the names of several of his fellow-clerks, and pretty flourishing capitals here and there; but this one that is referred to, both from its frequency and regularity, was most prominent of all.

Clayton Carmon had seen it there before he went home the night previous, and he had curled his lip and told himself that it was not true; that a hard and cruel fate had planned his fortune; that he himself had been given no voice in it, and that "luck" had favored Rob Senderling and others of whom he thought just then.

Oh no! he did not believe a word of it! He had said as much to the writer of it; but that young man replied that he had a notion that every man was at least in large measure answerable for his own "fate" and his own "luck," and thereat the conversation was dropped.

The junior partner, who was always at his post early in the morning, saw the pencil-covered sheet on the counter when he had first entered, and stopped to

admire the handwriting. A closer inspection led him also to admire the evident spirit of the writer, as he read this and other sentences traced there.

He picked up the sheet and carried it to his own desk. He might some day stand in need of just such a penman, and the one who had chosen these quotations was one who would probably make the best of himself and of his opportunities. How little did he realize when he wrote those thoughtful sentences in that well-trained hand how he might be building his own fortune in that very act!

When, grieved beyond the power of words to express, Rob Senderling turned away from the counter of his perverse and self-blinded clerk, he walked slowly toward the door of the store, and had nearly reached it, when his pastor entered.

He had come to seek the aid of the young business man in some matter of deep interest to the well-being of the church, sure that in him he would find both the willingness and the ability needed for the emergency.

The young man invited him back to his private office, and sat down to his desk with his brow still

clouded, and his heart still heavy for another's blind perversity, which was so evidently leading him to his ruin.

Sitting there by the desk his eye fell upon the sheet of scribbled paper with its oft-repeated sentence. He turned it half-way round, and, pointing to it, asked :

“ Pastor, do you really believe that?”

“ Under God—yes,” replied the pastor, looking straight at his young friend. And then he asked, as Rob still sat with contracted brow :

“ Has something seemed to go wrong with you, Rob? Remember it is your Father who rules above, and his wisdom can see as much farther than ours as his love is deeper.”

“ It is nothing in my own life, sir. In a wonderful manner has God given me all the desires of my heart. I have worked hard, and striven faithfully to be worthy of his blessing, and he has not withheld it,” replied Rob, with a thankful look upon his manly face.

“ I do not believe he ever does withhold it from those who thus honestly work and strive; and we do not really choose that for which we are not willing

thus to work and strive," replied the pastor, with the emphasis of strong conviction.

"How about Paul Elverton?" asked Rob, swinging around in his chair so as to more exactly face his visitor; though in reality the question was asked more for the sake of argument than because he considered him an exception to the rule that had just been stated.

"The desire of Paul Elverton's heart was to serve the cause of Christ and of humanity in the world; and I am sure that God will yet bless him with the carrying out of that desire, even if it be not in the way that he planned."

Rob Senderling sat for several moments apparently thoughtfully examining the toe of his finely-polished boot. Then his pastor spoke again:

"Why, certainly, my boy. Don't you see it? What would have been the use in God creating us free agents, capable of choice and action, if he had not intended that that choice, and the action dependent upon that choice, should govern our lives and destinies? The responsibility of his living rests upon every individual man, woman, and child before God. We are 'the architects of our own fortunes.' You re-

member how some poet (wasn't it Fletcher?) has put it :

“ ‘Man is his own star, and the soul that can
Render an honest and a perfect man,
Commands all light, all influence, all fate ;
Nothing to him falls early or too late :
Our acts our angels are, if good ; if ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.’

“ Why, we see it illustrated in every-day life and upon every side. The man who intelligently wills to make his life a noble success in any line seldom fails in the attainment of his desire, or else to that which God sees is better for him—that which, if he were brave enough, would have been his desire if he had known all that God knows.”

“ But, sir, there are many—oh, there are so many ! —failures in life. Yet surely no man wills to fail utterly and completely in his living,” objected Rob ; and the pain which he felt at the blind failure of his schoolmate, expressed itself again in his voice and his dejected manner ; for the thought clogged his heart as a heavy weight.

“ They fail in a large majority of cases because their standard is wrong, or because they do not *will*

to make their lives a success. We forget that negative good is positive wrong. See how that thought runs through all Scripture. We are exhorted to choose life, or our hearts will be drawn away after the things which tend toward death ; to give most earnest heed to the gospel, lest at any time it slip from us. To strive to enter in at the straight gate, lest we drift into the broad way of sin, whose ingress is so very easy. The promise concerning the land of Canaan was wide and abundant, and strength would have been given to conquer every inch of the land ; but the children of Israel were to enjoy only so much as they actually possessed by right of conquering and holding for their own. Ours is a life of struggle and constant contest. We cannot hope to *drift* into anything good or worthy of our manhood. God has honored us by giving us the ability to be men if we will. And now the matter rests with us. The promise of salvation in the life to come is to whosoever *will*—that is, he who wills in accordance with God's will ; and thus, willing, *does as God commands*. And I verily believe that whosoever wills in this present world to save his life to honor and

usefulness, may do so. He whose will is positively set toward God in his own appointed way, God will acknowledge and receive to his home at last; and he whose will is positively and intelligently set toward the achievement of an honorable and a high-toned life here below, under God may reach that too. That line is true. We *are*, therefore, the architects of our own fortunes."

The pastor had become quite warm and enthusiastic on his subject, and spoke with convincing energy, though Rob had not from the first really doubted its truth.

"I believe you are right, sir," said the younger man, now thoughtfully shaking his head. But then he added, with a heavy sigh, "I sometimes wish I could furnish wills—the right kind of wills—for some whom I know."

"Ah! but that is where the individual responsibility comes in! If you could furnish that to be measured off as you do your dress goods, or the successful results of it, the free agency of man would be at once lost. But I do not wonder that you feel so, for I do very often. My work for the Lord brings

me in contact with many people whose blindness, or weakness, or ignorance seems so apparent to me, that I do most heartily wish I could choose for them ; but that is impossible. The best we can do is to point out the way both by our words, and by our own lives, and then to leave the rest in God's hands. You have done this for the individual case you have in view ? ”

“ I have tried to do it, but it seemed of little use,” replied Rob.

“ If you have conscientiously done this, your duty is accomplished. The responsibility rests upon him. How I shudder sometimes when I think of that responsibility as it must appear in God's sight ! ” said this good man, gravely.

Rob put out his hand as if to shut some dark vision away from his sight ; and at that moment there came to him a clearer realization of the responsibility of Christian living, and of the awful, awful responsibility of *un*-Christian living, than ever in his life before. How must God look upon a voluntarily wasted life, so far as this world is concerned, and a voluntarily forfeited one in the next ?

A few months later, Clayton Carmon had been invited to form one of a gay yachting party, who were going that evening for a moonlight sail on the river. His wife, broken in health, and soured in disposition, could not go. She said, pettishly, that she had nothing to wear, and must stay at home to make over little Nora's last year's dress.

Nora Carmon was not a happy woman. The pride and self-indulgence of her past life had not prepared her for happiness in their altered circumstances. She was not sorry to-night that Clayton was going and she was to remain at home. The very presence of her husband had become annoying to her.

She allowed him to go out that night without one pleasant word of farewell. What bitter and unavailing regrets she thereby laid up for herself!

Some of the yachting party had been drinking deeply. All were gay and thoughtless. There was mismanagement on board; and when a sudden gust struck the sail, the yacht capsized, and in a moment the laughing, careless fellows were struggling for their lives in the deep waters. A number were saved by a passing boat; but Clayton, with two others, were

so much exhausted that it was impossible to restore their vital powers.

Thus Clayton went out of this world, leaving no one the better, the happier, the more useful, for his having lived. Thus he entered the eternal world without a moment's time for tardy repentance, and having all his life neglected so great salvation.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD.

DURING those first days of suffering, of darkness, and disappointed hopes, Paul Elverton was strongly tempted to ask, Why is all this? He had been so certain that he had been doing God's will, and preparing to do his work, that he could not understand this providence.

It was then that Edith Hendry received a part of the answer to her prayer that she might be a help to him. It was when the strong man's faith was almost staggered at this sudden reversal of all his plans that the woman's trustful confidence in the wise dealings of a loving Father failed not, and was beyond measure helpful to him.

"It is very hard for us to understand, Paul dear," she said, as she sat by the lounge and held his hand. "It is very hard for us to understand, yet God knows. He makes no mistakes, and we are in the right place, if we are where he puts us."

"But think of those perishing souls, who are dying without having heard of Christ. Think of those poor bodies that are suffering without relief. I was so sure God wanted me to go to them. In all these years of preparation I have constantly asked him to guide. And now that I am just ready to start, and you were ready to go with me—oh, Edith, why does he let such things be?"

"Because he is God, and knows more than you and I do, Paul. We are weak, and know but little. To us it seems the end of all our hopes and plans. To God it may be the beginning of better ones," she replied, with firm trust.

"But how can that be? I never was half thankful enough for my eyes. But what can I do for him now?"

"I do not know to-day. Wait, and he will show us. To-day you have only to 'wait patiently on the Lord,' and to get well as fast as you can. When you are well and strong, and ready to take up life's burden again, he will show you. He shows us only one step at a time. Perhaps, if we saw farther, we might forget or neglect the present duty; and since he has

not shown us, we must not question his gracious leadings."

"I felt so sure that I was right—that all I was doing, and hoped to do, was in accordance with his plans—that I feel staggered now. Even my years of preparation are thrown away," he said.

"How do you know that?"

"How can it be otherwise? I cannot go to Armenia now."

"Perhaps not; but you cannot say positively that your preparation and training have been thrown away. Wait patiently until God shows you 'what you should do.'"

Paul tried to wait patiently, and gradually he learned the precious lesson of perfect trust.

There were moments of darkness when the temptation to doubt was very strong, but then Edith would ask:

"Have you forgotten so soon the promise 'all things work together for good to them that love God'?"

"No, Edith, I have not forgotten."

"And you love God?"

"Yes, Edith, I am sure of that. I will accept this as one of his 'all things,' and expect good out of it yet."

It was a memorable day when the bandages were first removed. Edith was present, and Paul heard the voice that he loved, saying in tones sweet and low :

"There will be no sightless eyes in heaven. I can almost imagine, dearest, that you will enjoy the light of that city better than I, because for a little while God leads you in darkness here."

How Paul thanked her for those blessed words ! Stretching out his hands toward her in that piteous way peculiar to those who cannot see, he said :

"I almost feel as if the Lord had taken very little from me, so long as he has left to me your love, my Edith. I thank him for that every hour of my life."

Mr. Hendry had attended in Paul's stead the funeral of his uncle. The will when opened had revealed the fact that the old man had made his nephew sole heir of his property which, though not so large, would yield a comfortable support. Mr.

Hendry attended to the settling up of all necessary legal matters.

As soon as Paul had recovered, so far as he ever would recover, from the effects of that terrible fall, he and Edith were married.

"I must be eyes for you now," she had said, when she first heard of his blindness. And who could be that so well as a wife?

It was of course a very quiet wedding. The immediate family, and Edith's intimate school friends, Reba and Rob Senderling, were the only persons present.

"Edith," said Paul, a few days after that event, "if I could see, I would write a letter for publication upon the need of workers in the missionary field, and the best method of preparation for usefulness there."

"Well, Paul, you shall dictate, and I will write. I am glad you are finding a way for me to be eyes for you," she replied. And forthwith writing materials were brought, and they two set about their united task.

That was the first of a series of articles. Many an

hour Edith wrote at his dictation. Then she read and revised as he directed, and carefully prepared the manuscript for the press.

People read these articles, and understood as they never had understood before. His darkened eyes and disappointed hopes of usefulness seemed to make him more than ever alive to the necessities of the case, and article followed article, each one with more power than its predecessor.

His words came from his own full heart, and they stirred the hearts of noble men and women, leading many to give of their means, and some to give themselves, to carry on the work of God.

Though Paul never went abroad himself, his influence did ; and though Paul never told the story of the cross in person, nor healed the sufferings of those far across the waters, he aroused others to go on the same mission he had once planned for himself.

He wrote also upon medical themes, and writing from the standpoint of a thoughtful Christian student, God used his words with power. And many a sweet, helpful little poem found its way into the papers under his initials. They were poems such as we take into

our every-day life, and which help to make us stronger and better Christians.

Paul Elverton supposed his work finished, when he suddenly found his plans interfered with ; but Edith spoke the truth when she said, “ The end of our plans may be but the beginning of God’s larger ones.”

Edith was kept very busy in her office of eyes for the blind. She was very happy in her work of usefulness, and thankful that God had permitted her to enter on it.

Reba Senderling came often to visit her friends, and often helped them both, even when she little knew of it.

The conscious help was generally given by reading in her clear, sweet, even voice, something that Paul wanted to hear. The unconscious help was given, sometimes by her very presence, but more often by her music—for music has a wonderful charm and resting power to those who are wearied with literary work.

Reba had long ago given up the desire to be famous. But she sang in the church choir ; and she

played the organ in the church prayer-meetings; and sometimes she seemed to make her very notes a prayer. She was never known now to refuse to give to others the pleasure and help of her rare talent. She felt that it was a gift which God had given her, and bidden her to "neglect not." And in this use of it she found a joy far surpassing any which could have come to her through the channel of gratified vanity.

Sitting in their pew in church, or listening to her song at home, her father and mother, and even her once teasing brother Charlie, thanked God for the power and sweetness and tenderness of that voice.

What would not Reba had lost had she neglected her gift! Diligently she strove to improve and to use it, and God made it a blessing to many.

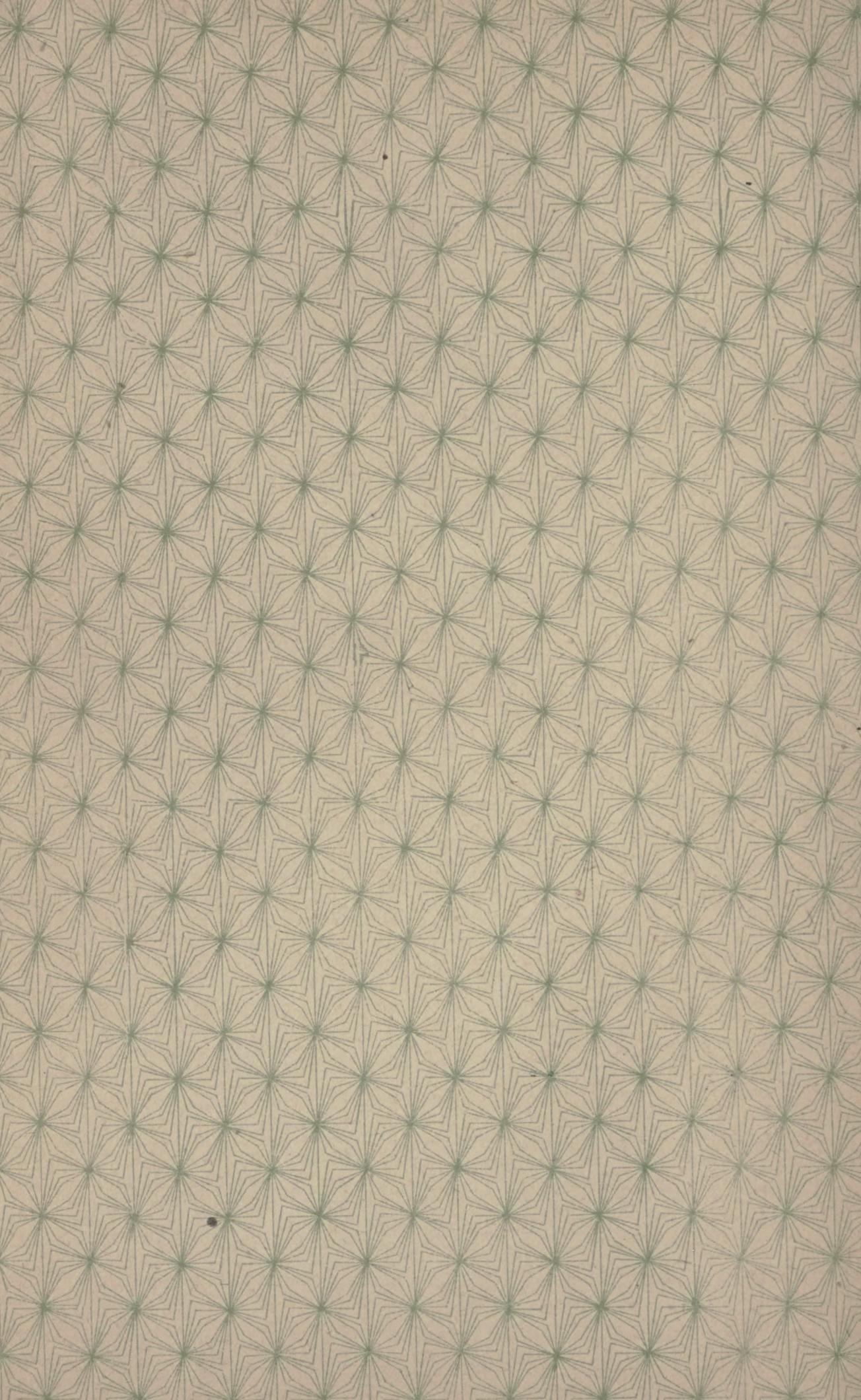
When Nora Carmon was almost overwhelmed by the great sorrow which had come to her, Edith and Reba, with gentle, loving sympathy, shown both in word and in deed, strove to soothe her breaking heart. Edith's wise and loving words, and Reba's sweet songs of heavenly consolation, reached at length the heart that had been so long hardened by selfishness and frivolity. And, as it softened under the influ-

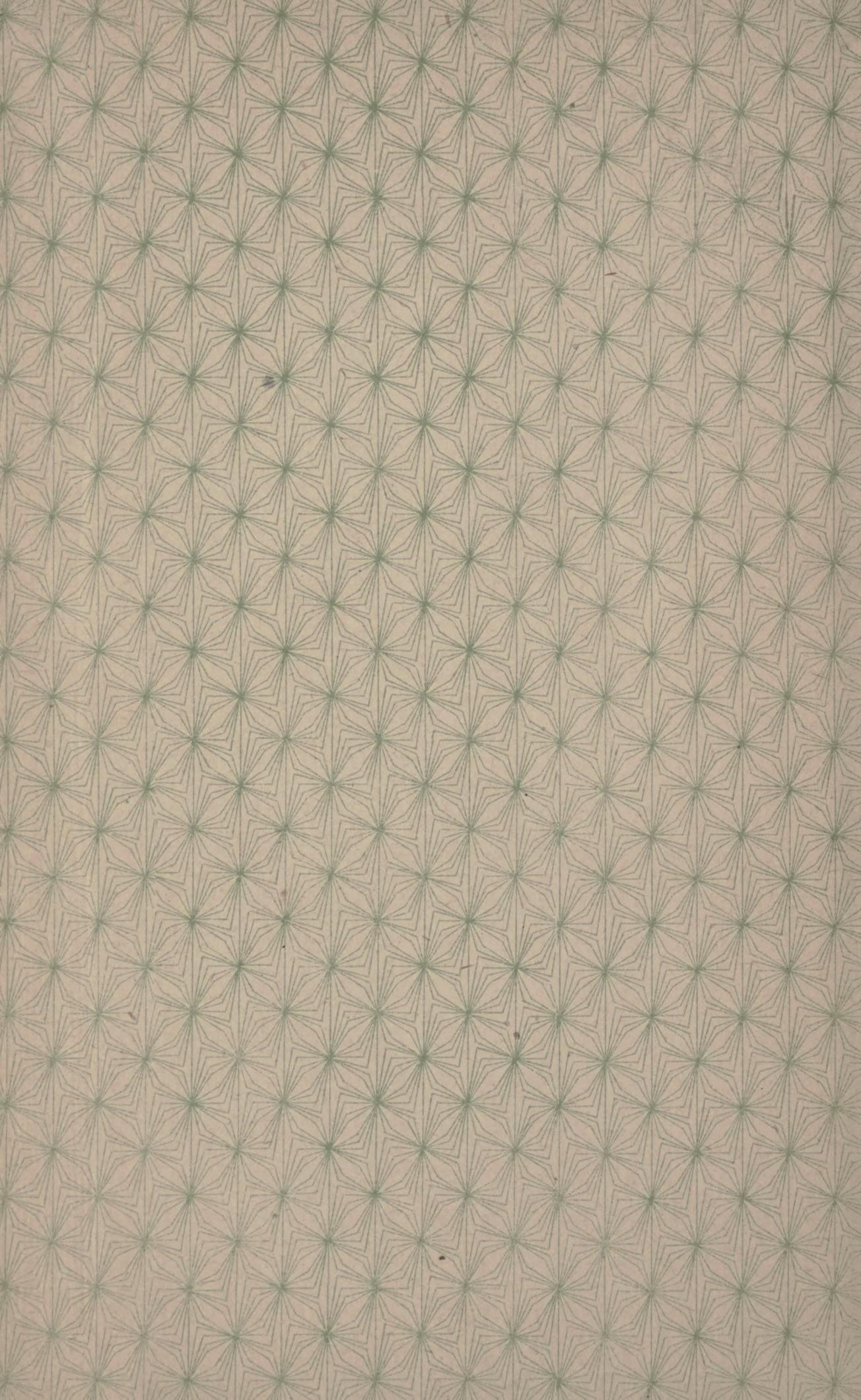
ence of the prayers and gentle counsels of these earnest Christian women, the good seed of the word sprang up and bore fruit to the glory of God.

Nora's earnest desire now was to train up her children for Christ and his service, and her fervent prayer for them was that early in life they might choose the good part.

THE END.







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